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The first twice-a-month issue, the Mid-September

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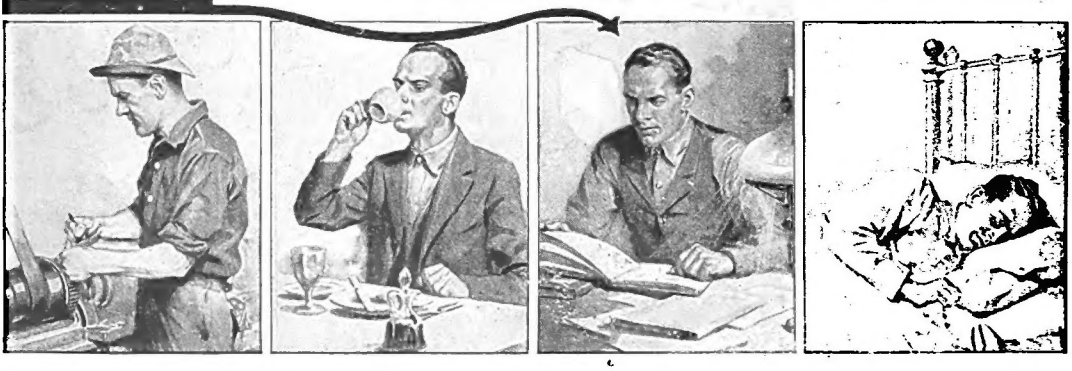

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ADVENTURE NOW PUBLISHED TWICE A MONTH

You won't have to wait a month for the next issue of *Adventure*. It will be on the stands August 18th—the Mid-September number. For nearly seven years *Adventure* has appeared once each month. From now on it will appear twice each month in response to the heavily increased demand for it. The price remains 15 cents per copy, its quality will continue to get better and better.

THE MID-SEPTEMBER ADVENTURE

on sale August 18th, will prove all four of these things. The complete novel, the complete novelette and the serial are by the authors who, by readers' vote gave us the three best-liked stories of 1916—"Longhorns," a Western novel by William Patterson White, author of "Paradise Bend;" "On the Account," a long pirate story by J. Allan Dunn; and "Gaston Olaf and Big Business," by Henry Oyen. You can't beat that trio. But you can add still other good things, and every one of the other stories in Mid-September will go to the right spot. Read the list of them in "The Trail Ahead" on the last page of this issue.

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Adventure
FIRST SEPTEMBER 1917, ISSUE
VOL. 14. No 5.

A MAN AND HIS NAME

A COMPLETE NOVEL

BY NORMAN SPRINGER

Author of "Gold at Sea," "Fire Mountain," etc.

IF HE had only been born with red blood in his veins, instead of blue, to live in a cottage instead of a mansion, this history would undoubtedly have been different, and sweeter. He was born with the mechanical instinct; in his boyhood he exhibited a passion for seeing the insides of mechanical things. Had he been cottage bred, he would have graduated naturally into the machinist's trade, and become a highly efficient mechanic, perhaps a genius.

But he had been born the son of Robert Kane, the "Great Kane" of finance. The doting father raised Robert Jr. by the child-raising formula most in favor with our native wealthy. This is it: "Does sonny wish anything?" To wish, is to have.

So Robert went to preparatory school and became an efficient snob, went to college and became a prince of good fellows, went to a desk in his father's office and became a bright light among the other bright lights of the Great White Way.

But such little trifles as wine, poker and chorus ladies come rather high in the metropolis. Young Mr. Kane quite abruptly discovered himself to be in a deuce of a fix. He needed money. For the first time in his life his expressed wish failed to bring about the desired results.

For old Mr. Kane suddenly developed a streak of stinginess, and refused to supplement Robert's princely allowance in the usual princely manner. Furthermore, Kane Sr. informed his son that appearing at a

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mahogany desk at eleven A.M., and departing from it at noon, was not his, Sr.'s, idea of a business career. Also, Robert would obtain greater profit from the trade journal, than from the "Follies'" program. And, most important of all, it was needful that Robert tickle his palate more frequently with Adam's ale, and less frequently with Bourbon. Finally——

"Not one cent, sir, until you straighten up and behave yourself!"

It was all most annoying. Sitting in an easy chair at the club, Robert felt quite moody and ill-used. What a stick the governor was with his tiresome preaching! The old Puritan! He should remember his own young days. Telling him to stop drinking! The idea! What would the fellows say?

Indeed, drinking was Robert's favorite sport, both indoors and outdoors. His earnest pursuit of the seductive highball and tantalizing cocktail had won him a badge of distinction in the sporting world. Obviously, it was impossible to ascend the water-wagon. Think of what the fellows would say . . . The thought of what they would say was so harrowing that Robert rapidly ordered a cocktail.

But it was most annoying. He was so deucedly hard up. He *must* have money.

Then Robert conceived a brilliant idea. It was absurdly simple, too . . . He ordered another drink, and wondered why he had not thought of it before. All he had to do was sign the governor's name!

He signed it. To a check. The immediate result was so gratifying that he continued to sign the governor's name.

The ultimate result was not nearly so gratifying. Kane Sr. took it hard. A Kane gone wrong! The name in the dust! His honor betrayed by his son!

The Kane name and the Kane honor were sacred things to Kane Sr. Family pride was his religion; he had endeavored to make it Kane Jr.'s religion, also. With this result. Kane Sr. could imagine circumstances under which a Kane might commit murder, but forgery was beyond all excuse. Kane Sr. saw his plain duty, and performed it, like the courageous, Christian gentleman he considered himself.

"You are a drunken, worthless scamp, sir! You are unfit to be a Kane! I am through with you; you are no longer my son! When you have mastered your low appetites, when you have become a man, you may return."

II

MR. ROBERT KANE, JR. passed the next few years in performing a bibulous toboggan from the top of the social hill to the very bottom. His descent was ordinary, disorderly, and inevitable, considering his history and character. For the "does sonny wish anything?" upbringing had effectually stifled his manhood and his fighting spirit. He naturally followed the line of least resistance.

Of course, he promptly left New York when his father disowned him. He possessed a full measure of the Kane pride—or obstinacy—and his father's words rankled. The governor had thrown him over! Very well, he would throw over the governor. A disgrace to the name, was he? Very well, he was through with the name. He descended from the train in Philadelphia as "Robert Brown."

He obtained a position as salesman of automobiles. He was a good salesman, and a good mixer. Far too good a mixer—of drinks. Indeed, young Mr. Brown never permitted his sales to interfere with his drinks. Soon—very soon—his connection with the automobile industry ended, at the industry's request.

In Erie, he sold soap. In Cleveland, he traveled from door to door inducing wary housewives to subscribe for a morning newspaper. In Chicago, he worked in a butcher shop. He lumped wheat sacks in the Northwest harvest fields. He spent a season in a Washington lumber camp. Wherever he went, whatever his job, his bosom friend was jolly John Barleycorn.

He joined the army of migratory workers, and tramped the Pacific slope as a "bindle stiff." He worked more and more infrequently, and drank more and more assiduously. He was completely thrall to the god in the bottle. He lost his grip—nay, never in his life had he had a grip, save on a bottle's neck; rather, he lost those occasional pangs of shame which formerly disturbed him.

He lost even the annonymous name of "Brown," and the last shreds of his self-respect went with the name. He was a tramp, a professional vagabond, known to his fellows as "Souse," because of his

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terrible thirst, and the persistence with which he assuaged it.

Time, to Souse, was divided into two divisions. There were happy days, and there were dry days. Happy days he was drunk, dry days he wanted to be drunk. He traveled widely, via box-car and brake-beam. He joined fellow vagrants in deadly "whiteline" jags, at jungle camps by lonely waterbanks; he rolled on the filthy floors of wine-joints and barrel-houses, in the city slums. He had forgotten he was a man—he was only a thirst.

This transition from prince of good fellows to prince of moochers took three years.

III

FIVE years from the day he had left New York, Souse reentered the city. But there was a difference between the departure and the return. He had left New York as Robert Kane Jr., riding in a Pullman, clad in clean linen and good clothes. He came back a peripatetic bundle of dirty rags, shuffling over the New York Central ties. Did he traverse the familiar streets suffering the orthodox agony of shame and remorse? He did not. Such luxuries of manhood as shame and remorse, Souse had long since dispensed with. Life, to him, was reduced to simple terms—there was thirst, and the problem of satisfying it. Souse had suffered from several dry days; he walked down Manhattan determined, by hook or crook, to make a wet night of it.

He made his shambling way to the water-front of West Street. He had an object in going to West Street, rather than to the tramp's stamping-ground on the East Side—water-fronts were Souse's graft. Fond memories of the water-fronts of Seattle, San Francisco, and New Orleans, informed him that drink flowed freely wherever the big-voiced, hearty shipmen congregated. They were a generous race—an experienced moocher like himself could wheedle many a drink on the water-front.

What Souse did not know, as he made his way to West Street, was that shipping was abnormally brisk in the port of New York, that able-bodied seamen were in frantic demand, that every marine bone-yard in the country had been raked over for bottoms to carry fuel from New York to the great conflagration on the other side of the Atlantic, that a fleet of laden, Europe-bound vessels lay off Staten Island crying for crews.

If somebody had told Souse all this, he would not have been interested. Shipping news, or any news of the workaday world, meant nothing to Souse. Of course, he knew, in a rather vague way, that the great war was nearly two years old, and that munitions and supplies were shipped from New York. But he was not much interested in mere world wars—a glass of five-cent whisky loomed much more importantly in Souse's eyes.

Souse found pickings very good on West Street. A knot of stokers cursed him for a bum—but, they bought him drinks. A gang of roystering seamen bought him more. Souse panhandled industriously, with unusually gratifying results. Night, coming to West Street, found Souse leaning against the bar of the "Blue Funnel" saloon, his carcass well filled with the poison he loved, his mood expansive and amiable.

A black-mustached man with shrewd, hard features, entered the "Blue Funnel" barroom, and stood looking at Souse. It was not the first time during the day he had looked at Souse—he had, himself, been much in evidence on West Street that day, and had watched Souse's progress from bar to bar with an interested and speculative eye. He had noted Souse's entrance into the "Blue Funnel," and had followed him. Now he stood just within the door, and subjected the unconscious Souse to a deliberate inspection.

There was little in Souse's appearance to invite strong scrutiny—save, perhaps, from a policeman. He was not a pretty sight, lounging there at the bar, his unwholesome face stupid with drink. His age was really twenty-seven, but his vice had added fifteen years to his face. He was a ragged, filthy, bloated caricature of a man. No, not a pretty sight.

But Black Mustache was not looking for pretty sights, he was looking for beef. That speculative light in his eyes was caused by the good width of Souse's shoulders, and his body, which at least, looked solid. Black Mustache reflected that that solid-looking body might possibly fetch him a hundred and fifty good, honest dollars. It was Black Mustache's business to dispose of human beef for gain, and, just now, his business was booming.

Black Mustache stepped to the bar, by

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Souse's side, and with a flourishing gesture attracted the barkeeper's attention. Then he turned to Souse, with a fine bluff heartiness of manner.

"I'm buyin' tonight, feller. Have one with me?"

Souse would. He was full, but not too full for another one. Souse always had room for another one—and one after that. Black Mustache bought them both, and Souse slobbered thick-worded thanks through moist, blue lips.

"Down her, feller. Another one comin'," admonished the spender. "Huh—sailor, ain't you?"

It was part of Souse's road philosophy to always agree with the man who was buying—so he might continue to buy. He would have cheerfully admitted himself a Baptist clergyman, had he thought a drink would reward the admission. In this case, he sensed that Black Mustache would be pleased by an affirmative answer, so he promptly discovered himself to be a nautical person.

"Shailor? Yeh—sure, I'm shailor guy," he said.

"Huh. What on—garbage scow?" commented the other. "Well, never mind—do anyhow. Have another one."

Souse had it. He remembered the name of his ship, and rashly essayed description of her.

"Huh—some ship, wooden boilers an' no bottom," dryly observed Black Mustache. "An' you're some shellback, you are. Say—what's yer name?"

"Name? Oh, my moniker's 'Souse,' " replied Souse.

" 'Souse,' exclaimed his questioner. " 'Souse.' Well, now—haw, haw—'Souse.' 'Souse' says he, and souse he is. Won't it look nice on the articles, now? 'Souse'—haw, haw. Come on, Souse, have another one!"

IV

THE American bark, *Sequoia*, was putting to sea, and Mister Macgowan, her mate, was a very busy and harassed man. Under the happiest of conditions, the chief kicker of a windjammer has his hands full the first day out. Mister Macgowan discovered present conditions to be anything but happy, and his hands more than full.

In the first place, New York to Archangel this late in the year was no soft prospect—bonus or no bonus. It meant driving her, to get there and away again before ice time, and Mister Macgowan loved an easy passage.

In the second place, the man who should be assisting him in bringing order out of chaos, Mister Blinker Price, second mate, was peacefully snoring away the effects of the bottle he had fetched aboard, while he, Macgowan, did double work. And the Old Man was in a vile humor, prancing the poop, and hurling sulfuric-tinted queries forward. He wanted to know when the decks would be cleared of this blanked raffle. Macgowan thought resentfully that if the Old Man was in such a hurry to get the decks clean, he could afford to lay aside his dignity for once and lend a hand.

Finally, there was the crew to complete the mate's trials. Positively, said Mister Macgowan, this crowd was the limit. That various named crimp had put on board the rottenest mob of lubberly, lazy, rum-soaked beach-combers he had ever clapped eyes upon. There was no life to them. They needed hustling, and——, he was the fancy man who would hustle them, Seaman's Act or no Seaman's Act. He hustled them.

The boatswain came to him with a disgraceful piece of news, an item which proved the boatswain's own incompetence.

"All turned to, sir, 'cept one 'and," reported the boatswain.

"One hand," exclaimed Mister Macgowan. "Where is he?"

" 'E's dead O," said boatswain. " 'E's flopped on the foc'sle floor, a most 'orrible lookin' hobject, sir. Carnt wake 'im. 'E's no sailor, says I, 'e looks like a bloody stiff."

"You can't wake him up, hey?" inquired Mister Macgowan, sarcastically. "And you call yourself a bosun. Well, m'son, just come along with me—I'll wake him up for you!"

So it was that Souse awakened to find the toe of a number ten sea-boot prodding him ungently in the ribs. Of course, Souse did not know that the red-faced man bending over him was entitled to prompt, implicit obedience, neither did he know that the floor he was lying upon was a forecastle floor, or that the sickening heave of that floor was the result of aught save the outraged protest of his stomach. He awoke to want a drink—and to remember the hearty,

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black-mustached man who was so freely buying when last he had a glimmer of intelligence. Perhaps this angel was still about, still buying. So, Souse sat up and looked about him.

"So you've decided to come to life, have you?" queried Mister Macgowan. "Well, now, you're a pretty specimen, you are. Up on your feet!" The number ten sea-boot commenced a lively tattoo.

"Hey—what y'doin'," mumbled Souse. But there was no resentment in his voice. Surprise was gradually filtering through the alcoholic fog that shrouded Souse's brain, surprise so vast it made him indifferent to kicks. He was staring blankly about the forecastle, at the bare walls, the tiers of bunks, the chests and bags.

This was no barroom—or jail. He stared at the grinning men looking in through the open doorway, at the deck and rail behind them, and, as the ship rolled, at the racing waters beyond the rail. Souse realized one fact—he was on a ship, at sea. But he needed help to puzzle the thing out. He needed—a drink. He squinted up at Mister Macgowan, and whined his need.

"Say, bo, could you stake a guy to a drink?"

"Bo!" Mister Macgowan regarded Souse with frank amazement. He, the "Mister" called a "Bo"! And naively mooched for a drink, while he kicked this dirty hulk in the ribs!

"Eh, what's that—a drink you want?" exclaimed the mate. "Ay, I'll give you a drink, m'son. A bucket o' salt water, and stand by till you guzzle it down. Here, now—let's have a look at you."

A hand, of the size, color, and general shape of a good-sized ham, fastened upon Souse's collar, and hauled him erect. Then the mate thrust him against the wall, and favored him with a critical and appraising inspection.

Souse returned that fierce glare much as a mesmerized bird might look at a snake. It occurred to Souse that his simple request had been a mistake. He did not like this red-faced man.

Nor did the mate appear favorably impressed by Souse's inflamed, bloated face, and bloodshot eyes. His nose wrinkled with disgust, and he spat, as though to cleanse his mouth.

"Say, now, what kind of a flaming bird are you?" he demanded. "You an able seaman, hey?"

A fear was gripping Souse's belly, making him forget even his whisky craving. He hastened to agree with that terrible, threatening authority.

"Y—yes," he said.

"Yes—yes what?" barked the mate. "Yes, *sir*, m'son!"

"Yes, sir," corrected Souse.

"You're a filthy liar," stated Mister Macgowan. "You, an able seaman? You! Why, you're a blasted stiff, that's what you are!"

"Yes, sir," agreed Souse.

"Stiff—blasted stiff," repeated Mister Macgowan. "A dirty, mooching barfly—that's what you are. And here you are on my ship as an able seaman, taking some good man's billet. Well, now, m'son, you're going to do a man's work, or a monkey's, on board this packet, let me tell you. Hey, Stiff! Are you going to do a man's work? Are you going to turn to, Stiff?"

Stiff was. Stiff was willing to turn to, turn a handspring, turn himself into a frog, or attempt any other feat this arctic-eyed, ferocious-voiced gentleman demanded. No longer "Souse," but "Stiff"—and as "Stiff" he stumbled out of the forecastle door, at the urge of the mate's boot, and to work. To work!

V

"OVERWORK," said the heart specialist. "Business worry," said the nerve specialist.

Kane Sr. said nothing. But he knew it was neither work, nor worry over work; his sickness was of the soul. It was loneliness, the dreadful loneliness of the old man without kin, of the man who has lost his one child. The head of the detective agency who had waited upon him a few days previous, could, perhaps, have accomplished a truer diagnosis of his ailment than these two medicos.

"It is hopeless, sir," the detective had said. "There is absolutely no use in our further wasting your money in a hopeless search."

"You have discovered no trace?" inquired Kane Sr.

"Not a single clue in three years that amounted to anything," was the reply. "I am very sorry, sir; we have done our very

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best. But—the proposition is worse than a needle in a haystack, you know—a hundred million people, and a continent to lose himself in. To discover him, sir, would be a matter of blind luck—and we have not been lucky. Perhaps he will come back himself?"

Kane Sr. shook his head.

"No. I sent him away, and he will never come back. He is a Kane."

Well did Kane Sr. know the Kane pride. Who better? Ne was finding the Kane pride a sorry companion for his old age.

"Then, sir, we shall discontinue our efforts—save, of course, for the 'personal' advertisements in the press?" said the detective.

Kane Sr. despairingly agreed. The detective departed, and with him departed, also, the last of that hope which had heartened his patron for three years, the hope against hope that some day he would recover the son his oft repented anger had banished. Now, even that pitiful shred of hope was gone. There descended upon Kane Sr. a weariness so complete, a distaste of life so bitter, that this consultation of medical experts was the prompt consequence.

"Must have complete rest," stated the specialist of the heart.

"And complete quiet," agreed the nerve specialist.

"The mountains," said the heart man.

"Sea voyage," asserted the nerve man.

"No!" exclaimed Kane Sr.

He possessed a shrinking horror of both mountain resorts and ships filled with chattering tourists.

"Yes—we insist," declared the doctors.

"Well, then—the sea voyage," conceded Kane Sr.

"Ah, Florida? West Indies?" asked Nerves.

"No!" declared the patient.

Neither Florida, nor the West Indies, he was promptly determined. And, these war days, the Mediterranean was closed to traveling invalids. Nor would he go on an ordinary passenger ship, carrying his heavy grief among a horde of pleasure seekers. Alone, he wanted to be alone. If he must make a sea trip, he would make it in one of his own ships.

For Kane Sr., among other things, was interested in ships. He called to mind the different vessels of his line—and the *Florence Kane* was instantly thought of. She was, he knew, even then loading in port. It gave him a certain pleasure to think of the *Florence Kane*. She was just a commonplace, five-thousand-ton cargo boat, but she was named after his dead wife, the lost mother of his lost boy. There must be, he thought, a subtle bond of sympathy between him and the *Florence Kane*. The thought of the long, lonely voyage she was about to make pleased him. He would find the solitude his soul craved on the *Florence Kane*.

"I shall make a trip on one of my own freighters," he told the doctors. "To Russia."

"To Russia!" they exclaimed. "But—submarines!"

"No danger," said Kane Sr. "The *Florence Kane* is going to Archangel with munitions. Her course is to the north of Europe, into the Arctic, well away from the submarine zone. She is loading in port now—I'll delay her departure a couple of weeks, while I prepare my interests for my absence."

The two doctors, well pleased, found themselves in complete agreement. This was much better than they had hoped for—Kane Sr. was a stubborn, iron-willed patient. This would be a real sea voyage, much better than the conventional trip on a floating hotel, where the invalids discussed business among themselves, and received wireless reports of the market twice a day. A trip like this would make a new man of Kane.

"A fine idea," they said.

VI

THE bark, *Sequoia*, was making a wet, zigzag way of it to the north and east, and there was wrath in the cabin, and consequent discomfort in the forecastle. It was to be a dirty passage, all hands declared, a back-breaking, heart-breaking passage, with pulley-haul and reefing from dawn to dawn. Inauspicious winds met them outside New York, and inauspicious winds pursued them with malignant perversity.

Captain Barnes was not commonly an irascible man, but now his mind was filled with bitter thought. He eased his mind into his mate's ear. . . A fine prospect, Mister, for the old barky—leaving New York in Summer, bound for Archangel!

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The way they were going, that White Sea would be ice-filled by the time they fetched North Cape. "They" should have known better—but "they" didn't care. Blast owners, anyway.

They had told him to drive her. Because the old girl had once made it to Frisco in a hundred, they expected him to make steamboat time across the Western, and through the Arctic. "Take chances," they had said. Aye—take chances. The blasted, pot-bellied, shore-going sharks! Told *him* to take chances, but *they* took no chances, you bet!

This cargo underfoot, that they were so anxious to get to the destination—why, the Russian government had paid through the nose for it before ever they left the dock, paid also for full ship insurance—a fancy figure, and a fancy premium, Mister. Take chances—drive her. Aye, "they" could tell him that easily enough—"they" wouldn't be out a red cent if he drove her to Davy Jones. . . .

How in the name of all unprintable things could he drive her, anyway, with the wind in his teeth week in and week out? Answer him that, Mister. Where the purple question mark were the Westerlies? . . . And, if Mister would lift a weather eye, instead of standing there muzzling his quid like some old cow, he might perhaps discover that favorable results would follow bracing her up another point, or so.

Whereat, Mister Macgowan's mind filled with bitter thoughts, and he eased his mind into the crew's ears. He might not be able to drive the ship, but, Oh ——, he could drive those scalawags of his watch. He could make that Stiff step lively!

Particularly, did Mister Macgowan ease his mind into the ears of the wretched Stiff. There was, said Mister Macgowan, but one set of words to use to a Stiff. He used them, oh, full frequently he used them.

"Blankety blank!" said Mister Macgowan. "Blankety blank blank—you Stiff! Lively, now!"

Lively, Stiff would step. He was used to men swearing at him—bartenders and policemen—but he was not used to such swearing as this. Shipboard swearing, like other shipboard things, the Stiff was finding to be terrifying—and *stimulating*. It made even a bum like work. Also, his experience during the first day, after the mate's seaboot had set him to work, taught him that this swaggering man who bossed him was nothing loath to supplement his curses with a clout from a ready fist.

Oh, that Stiff quickly learned to step lively on the *Sequoia's* decks. He bent his back over lines, and grunted with heavy, honest pulls—while the corruption of the swinish years streamed off his soft, sore body as sweat. Stiff was working—and suffering.

Suffering, is a mild word for his agony of body and mind during his first days on the ship. A man cannot turn himself into a walking whisky cask for a period of years, and then become suddenly teetotal, without very unpleasant results. As Stiff discovered.

The first day it was not so bad. True, it was a nightmarish horror to awake in a strange world, and be driven at hard work while still reeling from last night's potations. But, there was a drink at the close of the day. For Stiff, while the watches were being picked, appealed to the Old Man.

"What—shanghaied?" remarked the captain. "Well—you came on board drunk, did you not? Can you really swear you did not sign articles? And, if you did not, what the devil are you doing here?"

Stiff could not say—and Captain Barnes knew very well he could not. Stiff realized that he might very well have shipped, while under the wet spell of the black-mustached man.

"I have a name on these articles for every man on board," continued the captain. "Your name must be here—this, now?"

He thrust the paper before the Stiff's face, and Stiff saw, to his amazement, a flourishing "A. Souse" written upon the space indicated by the Captain's finger. It was not his handwriting, but it did "look nice upon the articles," as the jolly crimp had predicted.

"Why—that's my moniker," exclaimed Stiff. "But, I didn't write it."

"Can't help that," said Captain Barnes. "I suppose you were too full to write. Can not do anything now. Anything else?"

Nothing else. Stiff knew he must make the best of it. It was no uncommon occurrence for one of his tribe to be kidnaped to sea, he knew more than one Knight of the Road who included in his experiences a bewildered awakening on a forecastle floor. There was no redress—what rights have vagabonds? There was

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nothing else, except—this captain did not seem "horstile."

"I guess I'm the fall guy," said Stiff. "All right—I'll make the best of it. But, captain, I'm all shot to pieces—will you give me a drink?"

Captain Barnes inspected the trembling, scarecrow figure before him. He was really a sympathetic man; he was sorry for himself, for all hands, even for this sodden derelict. It was an outrage, he thought, to crimp a man, but—ships must have crews. Still, he would willingly have swapped this particular member of his crew for an old deck broom, or a day's fair breeze. Never before had his forecastle contained such a seedy specimen—and he had paid that thieving crimp a hundred and fifty for an able seaman. Regarding the drink, though, this fellow plainly needed a bracer.

"Tell the steward I said to give you a nip," he told Stiff. "Tell him, also, to fit you out from the slopchest. Then go for'rd, and behave yourself. This voyage will make a man of you."

Stiff went in search of the steward.

"He needs to have the booze worked out of him," commented the Old Man to the mate.

"He'll have it worked out of him," promised the mate. "He's in my watch."

Stiff gulped the four fingers of fiery liquor the steward grudgingly gave him, took his bag of clothes, and went forward. The whisky gave him rest for the time. The afternoon's work had tired him, and given him the keenest appetite he had felt for months. He promptly got outside his whack of cracker hash, and went peacefully to sleep in his bunk. He even had difficulty in keeping awake on lookout, during his watch on deck—for Mister Macgowan decreed that, since the Stiff was useless at the wheel, he must pass all his night watches on the forecastle head, as lookout.

But there was no drink for Stiff at the close of the second day. Nor any prospect of obtaining one, so the steward profanely told him. Stiff's appetite was not so good, and he did not sleep so well in his bunk, although his flabby muscles protested their weariness. He paced his lookout that night in a nervous frenzy, his mind obsessed, his body fairly crawling, with desire for alcohol.

The third day was plain hell. He worked—he had to work—but his tortured nerves would not permit him to "step lively," and he was hazed in consequence. He was a man possessed by devils, and the devils drove him aft to plead for whisky. Mister Macgowan promptly kicked him forward again. He ate nothing. At night he commenced to see things—bright colored, prancing rats, and creepy, weird things that curled in and out of the dark corners of the forecastle.

Stiff immediately informed the forecastle that he was seeing these things. He sat up in his bunk, and informed them at the top of his terrified voice, his eyes a-popping. Whereat, the forecastle became highly incensed, and so informed Stiff, at the top of its voice.

It was bad enough, said the forecastle, to have a dirty Stiff there at all, without having him raise the deck in the middle of the watch below. It would have been a different matter had he been a nice, clean able seaman, as he was drawing pay for being. But, a ruddy, blushing, flaming, filthy Stiff, hollering his head off, and disturbing good sailormen's rest. Too much! No Stiff, said the forecastle, should ever disturb sailormen's rest. So, they took the poor Stiff by his head and his ankles, carried him out on deck, and soused him in the wash-deck tub. Then they flung him upon the forehatch to get rid of his horrors as best he might.

He got rid of them. They were either frozen to death, or scared away, during those terrible hours he gasped on the forehatch. Not again did the prancing rats, and creepy things, disturb his rest. He ate his breakfast next morning, and found himself again able to "step lively." The craving was still with him, of course, but it was not so fierce as yesterday. And he had no time to brood upon it—he had to work.

Work! Stiff worked as he had never worked, even in the harvest fields and lumber camps. Mister Macgowan saw to that. Mister Macgowan had told him that first morning he would either do a man's work or a monkey's. Stiff was unable to do a man's work, so the simian labor was his portion.

He discovered that a monkey's work on board the *Sequoia* included the hard, dirty, disagreeable tasks. It also included practise trips aloft. Mister Macgowan said that no man on his ship could be unskilful above

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decks, so every morning in the four-to-eight watch on deck or watch below, the Stiff was chased up the rigging.

"Up the weather and down the lee—four times, m'son!" the mate would say—or Mister Price, second mate, would say it, if he had the watch. "Step lively, now—over the truck. And then, Stiff, you can commence with the foreroyal, and overhaul the buntlines."

Stiff went up the first time in a state of abject terror, only proceeding because the boatswain followed after, a few ratlines below, significantly shaking a belaying pin. It was horrible, thought Stiff, he would surely fall, he would never get used to it. But he did. Next morning it was not so horrible. Within a week he went over the truck without a qualm. Soon he was laying out on the yards with his watch, fighting the canvas—not quite like an able seaman, but doing pretty good for a Stiff, the forecastle allowed.

Thus did Stiff wrestle his thirst with work. Mister Macgowan helped him—Stiff found he was to have no afternoon watch below. A Stiff had too much to learn to be idling away his afternoons in his bunk, declared the mate. All day Stiff worked, and part of the night he paced on lookout. It was hard driving. The muscles he had developed during his half-forgotten laboring days, while going West, lost their flabbiness and hardened, his body began to regain the trimness that alcohol, and the slovenly ease of vagabondia had robbed it of. "He's showing up better every day," said Mister Macgowan of the Stiff.

The forecastle was also saying things of the Stiff—and to him. They said he ate like a pig, and snored like a liner under forced draft. Which was true. They said he was dirty. Which was also true. Stiff had been dirty for so long he had forgotten what it was to feel clean; the years of piggish sloth had buried his self-respect so deep, that even the grueling work failed to exhume it. He was dirty, and didn't care.

The forecastle cared. They said it was a shame to put the nice, clean slopchest clothes on over a body that hadn't known water since Paddy Doyle sold his boots. They invited him singly, and severally, to wash himself for the good of his soul and the safety of the community.

"If one gets 'em, all gets 'em," said the forecastle. "Better wash, Stiff."

Old Donald, grizzled relic of thirty Cape Horn roundings, stated the matter more elaborately.

"Yuh ain't no good, Stiff. Yuh look bad, yuh smell bad, an', I bet, yuh taste so bad yuh'd turn a louse's stummick. But—it'd help a lot if yuh'd take a wash all over."

To which Stiff stared his silent, sullen resentment. Rage, not shame, stirred Stiff. He was Ishmael!

But the forecastle, finding their gentle hints had no effect, determined upon action. One evening, in the second dogwatch, they seized the Stiff, stripped him, and proceeded to renovate him. Four men pinned him down to the deck by his limbs, two others energetically applied sand and canvas, and icy sea water.

It was a thorough, an exceedingly thorough, scrubbing the Stiff got, it removed his dirt—and his skin. It would have warmed the heart of Torquemada, that scrubbing which searched so shrewdly the weak flesh.

It warmed more than Stiff's heart—it warmed into life the dormant spark of shame in his soul. It was a shamed, head-hanging Stiff who faced the jeering circle, and thrust his clean, shivering—and smarting—body into the nice, clean slopchest clothes.

VII

SHAME! Blessed, regenerating shame! Stinging, lashing shame!

Stiff felt it. That night, when he paced his lookout on the forecastle head, shame walked with him. That watch was a "look-in" as well as a lookout, for shame turned the Stiff's mind's eye inward, to gaze at and appraise himself. A pitiful spectacle! Shame turned his soul inside out, and dangled the corrupt, degraded thing before his scoffing mind.

There was no escape. He could not this time, as had been his wont, run away from self-scorn, the bitter flagellator; he could not this time shut his eyes to the world's scorn. His powerful, treacherous ally had betrayed and deserted him. Hitherto, whenever Shame tapped him upon the shoulder, Friend Barleycorn had promptly interposed his presence between Stiff and the specter—with a bottle in his hand, Stiff had laughed at Shame.

But there was no bottle in his hand now. Stiff was painfully sober, his brain but too

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clear-seeing and logical. There are few agonies of mind so keen as the wastrel's remorse, the borning pangs of a bum's self-respect are as bitter as childbirth. It was a desperate man who that night paced the forecastle head, a man who remembered his shameful past, who faced his shameful present.

Oh, that he had ever been born, thought the wretched Stiff, to so befoul a clean name, to so degrade all manhood! What manner of thing had he become! A bestial travesty on manhood, pariah, outcast—a "stiff"! He was despised of all men!

Conscious of the world's scorn, was Stiff, that hour. Those men aft, who so concontemptuously ordered him about with their "Hey, Stiff—here!" and their "Hey, Stiff—there!"—how rightly they despised him, how correctly they gaged him for the nameless beast he was! Stiff! Souse! . . . and once he had been Kane!

And his working mates, the rough, ignorant common laborers of the sea—how justly they despised him. Stiff had not thought of himself as "Kane" for years, but he thought of himself as "Robert Kane," now. He—a Kane—scrubbed. Scrubbed! Oh, but it hurt—that scrubbing. It was not the smart of his sand and canvased body that mattered, it was the smart of his sand and canvased soul that made Stiff writhe in an agony of self-loathing.

Scrubbed! He, a Kane, who had been taught the twin gospels of cleanliness and godliness from infancy, had actually sunk so low he had neglected this first of human decencies! He, a Kane, had been forcibly scrubbed by his none too clean fellows, so his filth would not contaminate their sty of a forecastle! And he had needed the scrubbing! That was the disgusting, the terrible part of it. He *had* forgotten decency, he *had* been dirty, he well merited the contempt of men.

Despised of all men—yes, and of the beasts as well. For the ship's cat, who was wont to keep friendly company with the Stiff as he walked the forecastle head, acted toward him with strange aloofness this night. Absently, he bent to stroke her—but, perhaps, she felt his agitation, and it made her restless. She would not submit to the caress, or come rubbing and purring against his leg. Instead, she sidled away, back up, and spitting.

Even the cat! Oh, the iron entered the Stiff's soul that moment. Even the cat, his one friend, deserted him, and spat her contempt in his face. He was sunk so low, he was so completely vile, that the cat would not endure his touch. . . It was then the Stiff lifted his face to the sky, and sent his despairing, voiceless cry into the night:

"God, is such a thing as I have become, fit to live?"

No answer came from the night to help the wretched man. The million eyes of heaven stared pitilessly down at him, seeming by their frosty glitter to express the universal contempt for this forsaken one. But he found the answer within himself. Fit to live? No!

Stiff stared at the cold, dark waters around. Was that the way out? The soft snore of the water beneath the stem sounded seductive in his ears. It would be so easy—a leap, and his dishonor, his shame, his stinging memories would sink into a wet, all-embracing oblivion. A strangling moment—and peace. Oh, it was tempting, and Stiff was keyed to the act. But shame, and something else, some surviving shred of the old Kane obstinacy, withheld him. Not fit to live! No. Nor fit to die!

For Stiff knew what "they" would say.

"A —— good riddance," would be Macgowan's comment.

"Stiff gone?—Hurrah, let's heave his duffle after him," the forecastle would chorus. "Good riddance!"

No; not that epitaph, however richly deserved! He could not take that all-ending leap now—after a while, perhaps. It was the way out, but he would take that way as a man, not as a "stiff." First he would face his contemptuous fellows as a *man*. He would compel the respect in their eyes. It was the way out, but he would—by God, he would—be a man among men ere he took the way . . . .

This was the resolution which stiffened the Stiff's back, and hardened his face into grim, purposeful lines—the first purposeful lines his face had ever known. He stood looking over the sea, exalted by his mood. It was the moment of his re-birth—but he was lonely, oh, bitterly lonely!

He felt something soft against his leg. It was the cat, purring invitingly, and rubbing her body against him. It was the last straw. Stiff sat down on the anchor stock, cuddling the little animal in his arms, the hot tears streaming down his face.

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VIII

EVERY forecastle has its cock—who reigns by virtue of his pre-eminence in the art of rough and tumble. The cock of the *Sequoia's* forecastle was Dorgan, of Donegal, a large bodied, heavy shouldered man, with a broken nose, and a Titian thatch. Dorgan possessed other forecastle virtues besides his chief one of being able to thump any man forward; he was the best all-around sailorman in the crew, and his profanity was of astonishing strength and variety. Dorgan, of Donegal, was a hard case, all hands agreed.

King Dorgan, like lesser men, possessed his likes and dislikes. His pet aversion was —Stiffs. Dorgan hated a Stiff. For why, asked Dorgan, should a dhirty Shtiff be allowed to clutter up a foc'sle—or, for that matter, clutter up the world? It was a dog's life enough, without Stiffs on board! It was Dorgan's firm conviction, oft expressed, that every outward bound ship should immediately dump its Stiffs over the side, once clear of land.

"Jonahs—ivery wan o' thim," declared Dorgan. "Luk at this passage, now—four weeks out, an' hove to in the fifties, wid niver the sign o' a westerly. 'Tis that dhirty Shtiff, I tell ye— niver was there luck wid a dhirty Shtiff on board."

Besides being Jonahs and lubbers, Stiffs were a treacherous lot, said Dorgan. You never knew what moment they would be putting on airs, and claiming the rights of their betters—therefore, they should be kept in their place. Treacherous! Why, one time, in Melbourne, he had been rubbing a Stiff's nose into a dirty foc'sle floor—because he hadn't scrubbed that floor in his watch below, as ordered—and the spalpeen had turned upon him with a sheath knife.

That Stiff went to the hospital, he did. But a long, blue scar adorned Dorgan's right cheek as a consequence of that treachery, and he never looked at himself while shaving, without being inflamed against all Stiffdom. Stiffs should be dumped, said Dorgan—but, since dumping was not allowed, it was a sailorman's duty to make them miserable.

Dorgan put into practise his peculiar beliefs with regard to the *Sequoia's* Stiff. Never, said Dorgan, had he seen a worse Stiff, a more complete Stiff, than this one they had with them. Not if Dorgan could prevent it, would Stiff find his forecastle berth a bed of roses. It was Dorgan who counseled the sousing in the wash-deck tub; he had also inspired the scrubbing. Dorgan did hate a Stiff!

The morning following Stiff's enforced cleansing, the port watch was below. As eight bells struck, they trooped into the forecastle, hungrily demanding breakfast, and Stiff, mindful of his lowly office of port watch 'peggy,' hurried to the galley for the porridge. He stepped lively, but not lively enough for Cock Dorgan.

"Stiff—ye scut," yelled Dorgan, "come runnin' wid thot burgoo, ye sandpapered monkey!" And, as Stiff entered the forecastle, bearing the steaming dish:

"What's keepin' ye Stiff? D'ye not know thot min— min—be waiting for their scoffin's, ye fancy, blushin' blatherskite! 'Tis me thot thinks ye need another spell o' sand an' canvas, to put loife in your legs! Sit ut down, and stand by till your betthers take their whack, me son—ye know phwat kind o' son I mane, ye gutter pup!"

A droll tongue, had Dorgan, and a delicate, delicious wit, in the forecastle's opinion.

Stiff meekly stood aside while his watchmates helped themselves; then he breakfasted sparingly off the scorched oatmeal in the bottom of the pot. It was a jolly breakfast for the watch—though a silent one for the Stiff.

Upon Stiff's luckless head fell club-like sallies. The watch was interested in observing and commenting upon the effects of the bath, seen now in the bright light of day. The effects were plainly visible, the watch declared. Indeed, they were shocked —Stiff was very pale this morning, never had they seen his skin so white. He must watch out, or he would catch a cough, better put on an extra shirt to replace the protective garment of dirt they had robbed him of. But Cock Dorgan declared it was only the Stiff's white liver they saw, and that the dhirty Shtiff was too black entirely to be claned up wid one scrubbin',—an' did they mind how the divil wiggled whin he shtuffed the sand in his mouth?

They remembered—and laughed uproariously at the remembrance. They remembered other things, every shameful little incident of the shameful episode, and they recounted them gleefully. Oh, it was

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a jolly breakfast for the watch. Some of them even remembered scrubbing other Stiffs in other ships. Old Donald even recalled how, when he was a young feller in a proper packet, they had heaved a bloody Stiff over the side, on a bowline, and given him a tow. He suggested they do this with the present Stiff—to rinse the sand out o' his gizzard!

Stiff endured in silence. He had expected this ordeal. He felt no resentment, even at the brutal thrusts of Dorgan—he felt he deserved them. But as he listened, his resolve strengthened—Dorgan, not a lesser man, must be the instrument. Dorgan, Cock Dorgan, fighting Dorgan!

A different Stiff from the Stiff of yesterday—this fellow sitting so quietly over his porridge, coolly considering the calling of Dorgan, while the forecastle wit surged against his ears. But the watch did not sense the change. They did not note the grim line of the mouth which was formerly slack, nor the steady light in the hitherto shifty eyes; the Stiff, to them, was the same abject, spineless creature they were accustomed to.

They could not know the peculiar thoughts that kept Stiff atingle, nor the high resolve he had made. Had they been informed, they would have jeered their utter disbelief. What — Dorgan — Cock Dorgan? Stiff call Cock Dorgan? Stiff fight! Unbelievable—but true. Stiff's goal was a man's estate in the eyes of his fellows, and blind instinct was urging him to the one sure way of attaining his goal. Fight, fight any of them, best of all, Dorgan! Fight, without hatred, without even hope of winning, to win his manhood! It was the counsel of the old Kane fighting spirit, awake within him for the first time.

So, Stiff's act was a complete surprise to the watch. He finished his breakfast, carefully put away his plate and pannikin and then deliberately accosted the Irishman. His month of forecastle life had taught him the etiquette of the occasion, and he spoke his challenge sharply, the vagabond slur gone from his tongue, his words clipped and even.

"Dorgan, come out on deck with me!"

THE watch exploded its astonishment in a loud, drawn gasp. Dorgan dropped his pipe, and stared in blank amazement at the Stiff, unable to believe his ears. He, Dorgan, called out on deck—by the Stiff?

"Phwat—phwat did ye say?" he inquired in a weak voice.

"I said, 'Come out on deck with me,'" answered Stiff, measuring his words and their effect. "Can you not understand that, you Irish ape? Perhaps you need a little of that sand and canvas in your ears! Well—are you coming out?"

Was he coming out? Dorgan got slowly to his feet, his club-like fingers curling, the incredulous astonishment in his face giving place to red rage. Called out—by this Stiff! Another evidence of the inherent treachery of Stiffs. A Stiff! The red blood flooded Dorgan's face, his red hair appeared to bristle, and his rage made him almost inarticulate. Called out by a dhirty Shtiff! Was he coming out? Aye, he was—he couldn't follow the Stiff through the door fast enough.

"By me loife, I'll lay ye up for the passage!" he huskily promised the latter. Dorgan would gain little glory by thumping this insolent Stiff—but an immense amount of satisfaction.

The port watch tumbled out at the heels of the principals, and they all took their way to the clean space of deck abaft the house. Here, the Stiff proceeded to strip to the buff with deliberate dispatch. Dorgan stood wating impatiently, scorning such preparation for so scurvy an antagonist, and muttering ferocious profanity. The port watch danced and hallooed their glee, the watch on deck, unchided by the interested second mate, deserted their work and crowded about, the news flew aft, and Mister Macgowan left the table and came prancing forward, the coffee dripping from his mustaches. A very show, this—a most uncommon spectacle! A Stiff out on deck—of his own choosing! The Stiff and Dorgan!

"Well—that blasted Stiff. Now, wha'd'ye think o' that?" said Mister Macgowan to Mister Price.

Mister Price said it was uncommon queer, and that he thought the Stiff had suddenly gone lunatic.

"I'll lay you five pound o' plug Dorgan finishes him in less than a minute," he offered Mister Macgowan.

The mate hesitated. One minute by the watch is a brief space of time, but Mister Macgowan knew Dorgan. It had taken him considerably longer than a minute

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by the watch to dress down the fighting Irishman, the day they left port—a half hour by the watch, to be exact. He doubted if Blinker Price could have done it at all—though he didn't say so. Yes, Dorgan was a scrapper, right enough—and the Stiff was just a Stiff. But the mate felt a sort of fatherly interest in the Stiff—also, he noted that the Stiff's nude torso showed up remarkably well, surprisingly trim and muscular looking. He might last a minute, after all.

"I'll take that bet," the mate told the second mate, and drew out the small-sized alarm clock he carried in his trousers.

A couple of seconds later he was regretting such a rash wager, for a minute seemed all too long a time for the Stiff to endure. Dorgan evidently intended to teach a quick, stern lesson.

For when Stiff stepped out upon the cleared space of deck, with his fists up, Dorgan rushed, and swung from the very heels a blow which should have driven the Stiff clean through the side of the house, and into the galley. But it didn't. Stiff ducked and sidestepped with surprising agility; Dorgan swung on his heel with practised celerity, lifting his guard, but not quickly enough to block the stinging shoulder punch the Stiff delivered. The crowd yelled, the Irishman swore wickedly, and jabbed his huge fist at Stiff's jaw—and the deck came up and struck poor Stiff in the back with a hard thwack.

"Oh, —— All over!" exclaimed the mate.

It should have been. By all precedent, a Stiff once knocked down should stay down, appealing, if able to be spared the boots. But this Stiff was breaking precedents. He was on his feet with the rebound of an india-rubber ball, his eyes rolling a bit dazedly, but the same purposeful, half smile on his lips, and the same initial vim in the quick blow he struck—and landed.

Dorgan shook his head, and jabbed a second time. Stiff hit the deck a second time. Up again—down again, up again—down again— One minute by the watch passed, two minutes—it seemed two centuries to the weary Stiff—and he was still dragging his gory body to its feet, to meet the club-like impact of the Irishman's fist.

The crowd had stopped cheering; they watched the Stiff take his punishment with a new-born admiration for the fellow dawning in their faces. By the fife-rail, the two mates regarded the scene with professional interest, noting the Irishman's savage blows, and the Stiff's strange gameness. For Stiff was past striking blows now; he merely staggered erect, and lifted his battered face to the descending fist.

"That Stiff's got an iron jaw," commented Mister Price, bitterly. "Why don't that Mick land on his point?"

"Two minutes— five times down, and, ——, he's comin' up again!" swore Mister Macgowan, admiringly.

He was in a most pleasant mind, his tobacco box was nearly empty, and he could use that five pounds of plug. And that blasted Stiff. Who would have thought it?

For the sixth time, Stiff reeled to his feet, and lunged toward his opponent. The thoroughly exasperated Dorgan was determined to make an end of it this time—he swung heavily, slipped upon a wet patch of the Stiff's blood underfoot, and sprawled headlong. Like a flash, Dorgan doubled his legs under him, and covered his face with an arm, to guard against the boots.

But to Dorgan's astonishment, as to all hands, the Stiff made no attempt to "put the boots." Instead, he drew back several paces, and, swaying dizzily, waited for the Irishman to regain his feet.

"The —— fool thinks he's in the prize-ring! Why don't he kick him?" disgustedly exclaimed Mr. Price.

"——, he's fighting fair—on a windjammer!" declared Mister Macgowan.

He was. Not a Stiff, but a Kane, was battling there on the *Sequoia's* deck, battling without rage, without hatred, for an idea, battling with the indomitable Kane spirit sustaining him, and with the old Kane shibboleths of "honor" and "fair play" preventing his seizing his one advantage of the "boots." He waited until Dorgan got squarely on his feet. Then he went toward him with a staggering rush, weakly flailing his arms.

The surprised Irishman was suddenly reluctant to further punish this fair-fighting Stiff. But he could not help himself. He thrust out his fist, and Stiff blindly ran the point of his chin against it, and dropped.

"Three minutes—and out," said Mister Macgowan. "That blessed Stiff! Now, whadye think o' that!"

Mister Price thought that Dorgan had acted disgracefully—permitting a Stiff to

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last three minutes, and losing him five pounds of plug. Mister Price had a canny eye for his slopchest account. This affair was so irritating, he felt bound to give expression to his spleen.

"Is that the best you can do, you ruddy Mick?" he sang out, sarcastically. "Why, the cabin boy could have licked that Stiff—and you let him last three minutes. Why didn't you flop him with a punch—the blasted Stiff!"

Dorgan slowly lifted his eyes from the Stiff's bleeding, unconscious form, and faced the mates.

"Shtiff is ut?" he inquired. "A blasted Shtiff, says you, Misther? Aye—but he's the dacintest Shtiff phwat iver come aboard this flamin' packet, as I have always said!"

His roving, belligerent eye quickly suppressed the titter of the crowd.

"A Shtiff, you calls him, Misther. Holy Mither, did ye iver see a Shtiff foight like thot? Man, did ye see the heart o' him—the foightin' heart o' him? A-comin' in wid his eyes shut, feelin' for me. Luk—me fist couldn't woipe the shmile off his face— A Shtiff, is he? Did ye iver see a Shtiff foight fair, like he did? He wouldn't put the boots whin I was down—sure, an' that's more than ayther o' you windjammer buckos would do. A Shtiff! Faith, thin, I'll tell ye, all hands—this Shtiff is me frind!"

Whereupon, Dorgan gathered the Stiff's gory, insensible body in his great arms, bore it into the forecastle, and tenderly deposited it in his own bunk.

IX

WHEN, a couple of hours later, the Stiff came to life, and peered through his puffed lids at the gaily decorated interior of the bunk he was lying in, he knew instinctively he had gained what he had fought for. He, the despised Stiff, tucked away in Cock Dorgan's bunk! Dorgan's artistic sense was largely captivated by pictures of ladies of the stage, in costume, which he clipped from stray magazines and pasted about in this holy of holies, his bed. Stiff gazed steadily at a chic damsel in ballet clothes, who pranced gaily on her big toe, a few inches from his nose—his swollen lips painfully twisted themselves into a grotesque but happy smile. Dorgan's bunk—he must have won!

He had, and evidences of his victory accumulated. The cabin boy thrust his pimply face through the doorway, and informed the forecastle that the Stiff was to lay up during that afternoon watch, because he had got such a fine lambasting that morning—and the mate had said so. Stiff glowed. An afternoon below. Unprecedented favor, from the waspish Macgowan, who declared that if a man could walk he could work.

Seven bells struck, and Stiff, mindful of his duties as peggy, essayed to arise. The watch profanely chorused him back to bed, and Dorgan sternly bade a Norwegian able seaman to fetch the dinner. Stiff thought he had better leave Dorgan's bunk, and creep into his own barren niche, but when he made the attempt, Dorgan interposed a fiery objection.

"I put ye there, Shtiff," declaimed the Irishman. "If I want a Shtiff in me bunk, 'tis not the domned Shtiff who'll prevint me—stay ye where ye are, ye foightin' omadhaun."

Oh, blessed, brotherly words. Stiff felt the glow radiate throughout his whole being.

But the sweetest flavor of his victory was reserved till midnight, when he turned out and dragged his sore body aft, to muster for the graveyard watch.

"You—Stiff," ordered Mister Macgowan. "You take a lee wheel this watch. About time you were learning a man's work on this ship. Hop aft lively, now. And, Stiff—hereafter ye'll take your regular turn on lookout!"

Stiff hopped aft to the wheel on the very air. A man's work! No longer rejected, outcast, he was a man in the eyes of fore and aft, fit to do man's work! It was a happy Stiff who grasped the wheel spokes opposite old Donald, and endeavored to force his vaulting thoughts upon the lesson.

"That's yer compass," said old Donald. "Yuh got to learn to box it. Nor', nor' by east, nor'-nor' east——"

"A man! A man's work!" exulted Stiff.

Even so. A man and a shipmate, Stiff found himself become. He had proved himself possessed of the one virtue venerated by his hardy, blaspheming companions—a fighting, physical courage. That day occurred the incident which finally proved to him he was one with his fellows. Old Donald, carrying a rope's-end, came and sat

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down beside him on the fore-hatch, in the dog-watch.

"Say, Stiff, d'yuh know how to make a Spanish bowline?" asked old Donald. "No? Well, she goes like this—yuh grab the line by the bight——"

He was a man in his fellows' eyes—but, was he a man in his own eyes? This was the disquieting question that troubled the Stiff, a couple of nights later, as he walked his regular lookout on the forecastle head. A man in his own eyes? Ah, no. Their eyes saw only the outer shell of manhood, which he had cunningly fought for and assumed; but his eyes beheld the weak and faltering spirit within.

"Unclean, unclean!" was his despairing verdict.

The Stiff had good reason for his troubled self-communion. He was finding that a few weeks' enforced temperance, and a high resolution, are, after all, weak weapons with which to combat a thirst of years' growth. Stiff found himself hating his old friend Barleycorn, with the bitter hatred of the repentant, fearful drunkard—and, desiring him as never before. The very stress of emotion he was lately undergoing intensified his lust for drink.

And, suddenly and inadvertently, was thrust upon him a sense of personal responsibility he was ill-used to. For he found the opportunity for drinking at hand. He could, if he wished, guzzle himself as stiff as his name. Did he wish? God, no! But, could he help himself?

That day, the boatswain had called him, and handed him the key to the boatswain's locker.

" 'Ere, Stiff—for'rd end o' the locker you'll find a coil o' 'alf-hinch manila. Fetch 'er. 'Urry!"

Stiff went to the locker, and found the coil of rope—found something else, as well. As he leaned over to pick up the rope, he caught a pungent whiff that tingled his whole body. There, before his startled eyes, was a can of shellac.

Shellac—alcohol! The words were synonymous in Stiff's mind. He stared at the can, his nostrils working, his heart pounding against his ribs, his very toes crawling in their boots. Alcohol—drink! In a sudden panic, he seized the rope and dashed aft.

But he could not run away from memory. Memory haunted him. As he walked lookout this night unbidden memories danced before his eyes. He could not fight them away—the memory of the paint store in Dayton, where he had got drunk on shellac; the memory of the jungle camp near St. Louis, where he and his fellow vagabonds had pilfered from a freight wreck a score of such cans as that in the locker, and caroused heavily upon the contents.

Stiff fought a more desperate battle, and a finer, that hour, than he had fought with Dorgan. It was good for his soul, perhaps, this fight with a handy temptation, though none the less agonizing for that.

"Shellac—drink!" Barleycorn whispered in his ear. "You know how to prepare it. You can get it. Just pry up the staple. Just stir it up with a stick—pure alcohol!"

The bare thought made the poor Stiff gasp.

But there was another voice in his ear, combating the first—the voice of his new-won manhood.

"Would you give it all up?" demanded this voice. "Would you slip back to the bottom, become a dirty Stiff again, just for a drunk? Would you give *me* up?"

No. He would not give up. He would—*By Heaven, he would*—be a man! That can of shellac might hide in the boatswain's locker for eternity, for all of him!

So declared the Stiff, as he walked alone under the cold stars, vowing abstinence.

X

ON THE same day the Great Kane, in New York, told his doctors he would make a sea voyage, Captain Barnes, of the *Sequoia*, found himself as flat becalmed as ever he had been on the Line. His position at noon was 56 N., 40 W. He stamped up and down his poop in a vile temper, reviling his luck into the ears of his mate.

"Did you ever know the like, Mister? Not a decent westerly breeze since we left port. Here we are on 56 north, and becalmed! Did you ever know the like?"

Mister Macgowan said he never had.

"Six weeks out, and half our easting to run down," continued the Old Man. "Why, Mister, we ought to be standing down the White Sea by now. That's where the owners expect us to be this minute—on the last leg of the passage. And, we haven't finished with the first leg, yet. Suppose there will be another —— east wind upon us tomorrow."

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"No, sir. She's coming this time, sure," said the mate, pointing to the western sky.

The long Summer daylight of the high latitudes was with them, and the sun was still high in the sky. The day was bright, cold, sparkling, and the heavens a deep rich blue, save the western sky, whither Mister Macgowan pointed. There, a brazen shield arched from sea to sun; clouding the blue behind it. Captain Barnes knew well enough its presence—he had been earnestly studying it all afternoon. That sheeny sky spoke of wind, west wind, and lots of it. But, for luck's sake, he would not admit it openly.

"Humph—believe it when I feel it," he told the mate. And then, as he went below, "You're all ready, Mister?"

"Yes sir, snug as a whistle, nothing loose about deck," answered Mister Macgowan. "Shall I douse the kites?"

Captain Barnes squinted aloft at the slatting royals. "No, by Heaven!" he declared. "Leave those kites till we *feel* her. If she comes, by Heaven, we'll drive her!"

"She" came, right enough. Near midnight, the heralding squall fell upon them, pelting the ship with a musketry of hail, stiffening the canvas with a zip and a scream, and lifting the mainroyal clean out of its bolt-ropes. The ship heeled over a good thirty degrees, and gathered way with a fair portion of the Atlantic Ocean lolloping over her lee rail.

Mister Price had kept an expectant watch, waiting for wind, but he had not expected the opening puff to be of such strength. But a mere whistling squall, although it might blow away some light canvas, could not blow away the self-possession of a man who had won his spurs "down under," below the Horn.

Mister Price's startled eye watched the white wisp of the royal disappear in the scud to leeward; finding in the instant his heavy-weather voice, his booming words carried forward, heavy above the scream of the wind aloft, and the crash of the seas alow. There were answering bellows, as the watch fought its way to the rail, and halyards were eased, and the downhauls of the light head-sails manned. Royal and topgallant yards came down with a run and a bang, the canvas threshed and boomed aloft, the stays groaned, and the vessel came up to a more reasonable keel. Came up, also, the watch below, half awake, half dressed, and wholly disgusted.

It was no flaming joke, said the watch, to tumble out without their oilskins into such a ruddy mess. They swore and pulled, clewing up with the icy water sloshing to their middles. It was no flaming joke, said the Stiff, to lay aloft in an undershirt, to fight hard, wet canvas and knot reef-points on a pitching topgallant-yard, while the wind nearly froze you stiff, and hail the size of marbles pelted your bare head. No joke.

Stiff battered his frozen fingers against the jackstay, to put life into them, and swore this was grim reality. No boy's play, this—nor Stiff's play! This was man's play. And manfully did Stiff do his share. He fisted the sail, and shouted his defiance into the screaming, gray void beneath him. Stiff welcomed the fight—the gale blew clear away those bibulous memories that had been tormenting him as he lay snug and warm in his bunk.

This spell of "weather" came as a powerful aid to the Stiff in his fight for mastery over his vice. For upon the heels of the squall came the true gale, a mighty wind out of the west, that blew undiminishingly for days, and weeks. It was the westerly that Captain Barnes had whistled so long for, the same brave, enduring wind he had so often put his ship before in the Southern Ocean, when making the passages that had made his ship famous. He lost not a moment in putting the *Sequoia* before it this time, and commencing the headlong diagonal rush down the longitudes, which would weather him the North Cape of Norway, and leave him within an easy distance of his destination.

Captain Barnes knew his west wind; he correctly gaged the one upon him. This was no three-day blow, he told his mates. This wind would last. Better see to spare gear and spare canvas. Better up with some preventer stays. This was a time for driving. The word was "Work ship," now.

Thus it was that a new phase of sea life opened before the Stiff. When, in the early morning, after the first fierce night, the mate came forward, instead of his usual, urgent "Turn to!" he told his watch, "Stand by and work ship, while the weather lasts!" This was a great boon to the Stiff, this release from the dull routine of fine weather. The stern work that replaced it absorbed all his energies, and left him no time for brooding upon his peculiar desires.

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A very different Stiff was this, from the frowzy, sullen individual whose body had been scrubbed with sand two weeks ago. Different indeed. That scrubbing had rubbed deep, worked a revolution, and the change was most evident in Stiff's appearance. No man of the crew was so neat, so clean looking, as this Stiff who welcomed heavy weather.

The forecastle watched the change with audible interest. When Stiff borrowed Dorgan's razor, and scraped his face clean of the scraggly beard, the forecastle had chorused delight and surprise.

" 'E's ten years younger, the Stiff is—and a proper-lookin' fancy boy!" declared the forecastle. When Stiff begged a cup of fresh water here, and a cup there, and sat up during his watch below to wash half-soiled clothes, the forecastle winked its collective eye.

" 'E's cured," said the forecastle.

But when Stiff manufactured a tooth-brush from rope bristles, and commenced to scour his teeth three times a day with salt water, the forecastle refused to enthuse.

"A tooth-brush?—well enough for some blushin' toff, ashore," said the forecastle, "but what the bloomin' query did a sailorman want with such a dodad?"

They crowded around him at the wash-deck tub, and watched with critical interest while he brushed away.

"For why?" they asked.

"To clane your tayth?" exclaimed Dorgan. "Houly Pathrick, an' you a-guzzlin' wather the day long! Sure, I clane mine wid a rinse o' coffee ivery mornin'!"

But the forecastle did not resent the tooth-brush as an aspersion, as some forecastles would have done. For a very good reason. Stiff had shown his readiness to fight—and, besides, he was Cock Dorgan's "frind." A friend was a friend to Dorgan, a fellow with whom one shared in common both battles and tobacco. Dorgan liked and admired this Stiff who had laughed at the weight of his fist, so the Stiff became his chum, and the rest of the forecastle hastened to take the proper cue. So, the tooth-brush, while jeered at, was regarded with only mild disfavor as being a harmless eccentricity.

Friendship! Oh, it was meat and drink to the soul-hungry Stiff to feel a friendly hand on his shoulder, and hear a hearty voice in his ear. It helped him stand squarely on his feet, and look squarely into the eyes of his mates—and how his heart did leap if he saw a friendly gleam there! How it helped in the fierce, unending struggle with his thirst.

He drank water, guzzled it the day long, as Dorgan said. And it was good for him. The clean, clear water soaked his tissues, and washed away the alcohol. There came days when Stiff even forgot his thirst entirely, for long hours. But his enemy was subtle and patient—would come a word, even a smell, and fierce desire would surge over him, while memories of drunks trooped through his mind. Never could he pass the boatswain's locker without thought of that can of shellac. But the Stiff grew the more determined. He had made a covenant with himself; he would keep it—even though that can of shellac came out of the locker and danced on his chest while he slept!

BUT the fight was a bitter one, and Stiff greeted the advent of the westerly, and the fierce work that came with it, with open arms. Work, work! That was his salvation, Stiff knew.

He got the work. Standing by to work ship was no snap on board the *Sequoia*, when she was running before it. Work, hard dangerous work, was the crew's portion.

"Drive her!" said Captain Barnes to his mates.

Drive her, they did. Where a more cautious man would have shortened to topsails, Captain Barnes reefed his topgallant-sails, and carried on. The three men aft watched the vast, straining press aloft with jealous, sea-wise eyes, and not till the very breaking-point was reached was a sail furled—to be shaken out again, when the crest of the squall was past. The steward kept the coffee-pot boiling from dawn to dawn on the cabin stove, and for skipper and mates, sleep became a matter of cat-naps.

Cat-naps for the forecastle, also. For the *Sequoia* was a modernized sailing-ship. She possessed a donkey boiler, which was never used at sea, and gipsy-winches, that never worked. In consequence of these alleged aids to ship labor, the owners were enabled to send the vessel about her business with a complement of fourteen men before the mast—where twenty-four would have been none too many, as the forecastle found to

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its bitter cost, when Captain Barnes commenced to drive her. It meant all hands on deck whenever a yard came down, whenever a backstay snapped, whenever was needed a strong pull here or a long pull there.

An undisturbed watch below was a thing of the past for the *Sequoia's* forecastle. The crew donned their oilskins, and lived in them, and their eyes grew red-rimmed from lack of rest, their voices hoarse from swearing, their hands cracked with sea sores from hauling frenziedly upon hard, wet ropes.

But the Stiff was happy. During these wild days of the westerly, he found himself a whole man. His craving—his sickness—was more mental than physical, and it found scant chance to harass him when his whole energy, his whole soul, was given to this struggle with the elements.

This was the kind of battle he loved, sang Stiff. How much cleaner, how much finer, this fight with the gale, than the other fight he had had to wage with an ignoble lust! His thirst was going, even his dread was going, consumed in the heat of this struggle with the wild west wind. Banished by work. Work! Stiff worked each day to the limit of endurance, and hoisted his weary, wet carcass into his sodden bunk, to sleep dreamlessly the brief space till the next call.

He was an ogre for work. No call for the watch found Stiff laggard. He was the first to hand a rope at the shouted order, the first to spring in the rigging at the bellow for hands aloft. He loved that fight aloft—lying over the pitching yard, with only the sagging foot-rope and his balance between him and the screaming maelstrom, fisting canvas that was hard as sheet iron, while the cold wind snatched at him, and froze the wet clothes to his chilled body.

Oh, it was cold work, cruel work—glorious work! A *man's* work! Stiff strained shoulder to shoulder with his mates, and bawled his hoarse, gleeful oaths to leeward, as the sail came up. Fight, fight! Oh, it was a fine fight, a fit fight for a man—or a *Kane!*

"By —— that Stiff! 'E's a bit of all right!" declared the forecastle.

It seemed to Stiff, those days, that a great weight had been lifted from his spirit, a foul fog blown away from his mind. He was alive to his finger-tips. He was tasting that keen relish of life shown alone to those who live and battle with nature. He was tingling with the sense of living, even when exhaustion weighed most heavily. He was able to pass the boatswain's locker now, without a thought of the enticing devil within.

"A fig for booze!" exulted Stiff.

Foolish warrior!—to so scorn his adversary.

He devoured work. But there was one labor connected with the long gale of which he soon obtained a bellyful. The pumps.

The *Sequoia* was a wooden ship. A generation of such driving as she was now undergoing had made her loose; and loose she was, despite the protestations of dockyard inspectors, and Lloyd's rating. In ordinary weather a Saturday afternoon pumping kept her free, but the buffeting of heavy weather always occasioned more constant attention. On the fourth day of the storm, the carpenter, after sounding the well, approached the Old Man and made his report in a worried voice. The Old Man ordered the pumps manned.

Clankety-clank, clankety-clank, up and down, up and down! The Stiff ate work, but this back-breaking, brain-stupefying work soon soured his stomach. Labor of the damned, thought Stiff. Nothing inspiring about manning the pumps. It was mighty hard cases, said the forecastle, to come down from aloft, fainting from weariness, and turn to on the pumps.

Clankety-clank, clankety-clank, up and down, up and down—while the driving hail stung their faces, and the cold wind searched beneath their oilskins, and the icy water swirled about their frozen knees. Stiff hated his spell at the pumps.

Now, the Stiff, since he became a man and a "frind," was looking upon his little world with new and comprehending eyes. Dorgan's expert coaching helped, but Stiff's awakened and spurred intelligence far outstripped the Irish sailor's limited vision. It was chiefly the native mechanical bent of Stiff's mind finding free expression. Dorgan pointed out the ropes, and explained their office—Stiff immediately understood the whole ingenious system of leverages by which he and his fellow pigmies controlled the rushing leviathan.

He looked at the towering, straining pyramids overhead, and understood that a sail was more than a rag, a brace more than a piece of rope. He took this same fog-cleansed, speculative mind to the pumps;

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and while his mates droned out the dreary dirge, "It's time to leave her, Johnny," and felt profanely sorry for themselves, Stiff considered the matter. Of his thoughts was born the Idea.

Which was the reason Stiff, after being relieved, instead of hurrying to his bunk for the precious moments of rest, went into the donkey-boiler room and stared for an hour at the boiler. He felt all the resentment of the natural mechanic at regarding an unused machine. The boiler squatted there, cold and lifeless, completely covered with a heavy tarpaulin; yet, Stiff knew, within that unlovely lump of iron slept the energy of numberless aching backs.

Why should he, and his fellows, kill themselves at the pumps, when this steam giant might do their bidding! Aye—but how harness this power? That was the question. The boiler, and its winch, lay just abaft the foremast, the pumps, abaft the mainmast, and a long stretch of wind-swept, sea-swept deck intervened. Could the donkey boiler be harnessed to the pumps? The forecastle scoffed derisively when he suggested it—but Stiff went thoughtful to bed.

The next spell at the pumps, he noticed that, whether by design or no, two ring-bolts were affixed to the deck exactly below the spreading pump-arms. He regarded them earnestly, and the Idea commenced to take definite form.

An idea is not subdued in an instant. Creation is a laborious process, and the conceiving mind patiently sweats the answer. Stiff sweated his answer with both mind and body. For seven days he turned the Idea over in his mind; then, he borrowed pencil and paper of the carpenter, and, with careful and unskilled hand, drew a diagram of his plan which resembled a Goldberg cartoon. This plan he placed in his pocket, and carried aft next trick at the wheel.

STIFF was taking a lee wheel these days, not for instruction, but to give needed aid. The *Sequoia* was a crank when running, and it took the combined efforts of two huskies on the spokes to keep her head true. Stiff toiled through his trick, opposite Dorgan, and glanced speculatively at Captain Barnes, who was clinging to the cabin skylights, staring aft into the heart of the gale. Stiff wondered if he should directly approach the Old Man with his great, perfected Idea. He decided against—the skipper looked too grim and careworn. He would see Macgowan, first.

In truth, Captain Barnes did look grim and careworn. Stiff's was not the only brow which wrinkled with thought this past week. Daily, the furrows had deepened above the skipper's eyes. It was a stern, creased face he turned to the wind this morning.

He saw nothing that softened the trouble lines as he stared to windward. Wind, more wind, harder wind, his sea-wise senses could not mistake the signs. He had prayed and whistled for this wind—but enough is enough, of anything. And he had had more than enough of this gale.

Twelve days now since the gale struck them, and seven days since it had hauled around to the southwest. Twelve days the *Sequoia* had run dead before it, slipping the knots behind with a speed she had never bettered, even in the Southern Ocean. It was enough, swore Captain Barnes. He wanted a let-up, now. This was no Southern Ocean, no world-girdling water, to foam through for weeks without butting an obstruction. This was the Arctic he was entering so boisterously, and close alee was the rugged Norway coast, while ahead—and too near ahead for comfort—was the ice of the Frozen Sea. He had reached the seventies, he knew, though not for a week had the midnight sun pierced the leaden canopy overhead to give him an observation. But his dead reckoning informed him closely enough of his position.

He considered what to do. Wear ship, and stand down on his course, with this terrific wind slanting him onward? An enticing prospect to a mind which delighted in reckless sailing. But—he shook his head sadly—the ship would never stand it.

Captain Barnes was worried about the condition of his ship. The old barkey *was* loose, and no mistake! Never had he known her to make water in such a free fashion, not even during the month-long blows "down under." Had she, he wondered, scraped ice, unbeknown to all hands, or was it just the strain of the driving? He looked down on the main deck, where four men of the watch were laboring at the pumps. They worked wearily.

The skipper shook his head again—twelve hours a day, now, and if the weather

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didn't break soon he feared it would be twenty-four hours a day at the pumps, and *karachi* watch. He had a good crowd forward, this voyage, better than he usually had these degenerate days. But there was a limit to their endurance, however willing they might be. He decided to tell the steward to keep a coffee-pot boiling forward, and give the men all the hot, strengthening drink they wished—it was all he could do for them.

Ice! Ice worried him most. For several days now they had been in sight of floating bergs. They did not worry him so much—a sharp lookout, and good luck might avoid them. But, how far ahead were the floes? Here they were, rushing madly into the Arctic—and he knew there could be no dodging an ice-field, which, like as not, would reach from horizon to horizon.

Heave her to, then? Earnestly he studied the storm sky astern. Out of there came the great wind, and squalls of sleet, or hail, or snow, which flung themselves upon the ship with monotonous regularity, raising the mighty pitch of the gale during their brief lives. The captain saw no promise in that storm sky.

No promise in the sea, either. It was the surprise of Captain Barnes's life, this huge sea which had grown with the gale. He had seen such great rollers chasing his ship in 60° south, but he never supposed such a sea could make in this land-studded corner of the world. He watched the waves roll up astern, towering, threatening, each third seeming about to crash aboard till the ship would slip down the water-hill, and momentarily outpace the danger. Heave to? Again he shook his head in a negative answer to his own question.

In truth, he was afraid either to wear ship or heave to. He found himself in the same boat with many another skipper who had been too eager to reel off the knots. He had run too long, and now he must run, whether or no. He did not dare attempt heaving to.

Shorten down? He did not want to, but he must—she was carrying too much for safety, and another squall like the last would find something giving away aloft. He stared aloft. The ship was only showing her lower topsails and foresail, but it was too much. Well, he would leave her as she was till evening, then the foretopsail would have to come in. He would leave the foresail as it was for the time—it lifted her up the water hills, though it did bury her head. Later, he would reef the foresail, if he must . . . After all, the issue was in the hands of his deity, Luck. Luck had pulled him out of many a tight hole.

He cupped his hands, and shouted his decision into the mate's ears—

"Tops'l tonight—leave fores'l till morning! Hey—Mister?"

Mister Macgowan nodded understanding and approval. There were no furrows of worry on Macgowan's brow—let the Old Man sweat and decide, it was the mate's job to approve and obey. The captain went below, and the mate, crooking his arm over a sheet-pin in the mizzen fiferail, settled himself to watch the ship, and wait for his relief.

The mate's relief and the Stiff's relief came at the same time. Stiff relinquished the wheel, and made a bee-line for the officer, bubbling with the vim of young genius about to express itself. Conversation was impossible on the wind-swept poop, so Macgowan drew the Stiff into the shelter of the cabin hatch.

"Now—whaddeye want, Stiff?" demanded the mate.

Stiff thrust the paper into the other's hand, and commenced a hurried, and somewhat incoherent, exposition of the drawing.

"Eh — what?" exclaimed Macgowan. "Donkey-engine—pumps?"

"A scheme to overcome the leak, sir," rattled Stiff. "You know, the pumps are breaking us down, and the leak is gaining—Well, sir, I have discovered how to attach the donkey-engine to the pumps, and we can get her dry. Here, this, 'A,' represents the boiler, the 'B's' are the niggerheads of the engine. The 'C's' are iron bars attached to the niggerheads to use as crank-pins—same action as a locomotive's crank-pins. 'D's' are cables led aft. . . ."

Macgowan listened with pursed lips, squinting frostily at the drawing. Stiff's plan was really most ingenious, and sound in principle. An engineer would immediately have enthused over it, and promptly adopted it. But Mister Macgowan was not an engineer. He was the mate of a sailing vessel, and he possessed all the old sailing-ship-shellback's contempt and hatred for steam, and all the works of steam. Steam had ruined the world, thought Macgowan,

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and a steam-engine was a devilish contrivance, best left alone. As soon as Stiff mentioned "donkey-engine," his scheme was doomed, so far as the mate was concerned. Macgowan would much rather put his trust in honest muscle. . . .

Besides, thought the mate, resentfully, what right had a foremast hand to originate schemes for pumping the ship? Schemes, and such, were the sole prerogative of the cabin. A foremast hand—and a Stiff, to boot—had no business meddling with such ideas.

He handed back the drawing.

"Huh—can't see it," he told Stiff. "—— steam gad-jets ain't no good, anyway. Takes muscle to keep a ship dry, m'son. If I was to use the boiler at all, I'd lead a steam hose aft, and shove it up the legs o' that bunch on the pumps. Put some life into them,——. And besides, Stiff"—he concluded triumphantly—"it takes a lot o' fresh water to run that donkey, and we haven't any water to spare for such blasted experimentin'. Never thought of that, did you?"

Stiff was bitterly disappointed, and his face showed it. Macgowan, looking at him, was agreeably conscious of the man's good appearance. Some difference between this lean, clean-faced, fit fellow, and the filthy, drunken wreck he had kicked awake that morning two months ago! Macgowan felt his heart warm—he attributed the entire change in the Stiff to his, Macgowan's, skilful handling of the man. B'Gawd, the fellow was fresh shaven! Macgowan knew just what sort of chilly purgatory the forecastle was these days—it proved the sound heart of a man, that he would take the trouble to shave daily in such an atmosphere. And the Stiff seemed to know something about engines, and such things. Macgowan did not take much stock in such nonsense, but—the topsails were to come in and be stowed that night, and that would be a terrible job. If they could use those thrice-cursed gipsy-winches—there was a job for this eager Stiff, if he could do it?

"Those gipsy-winches—think you can fix them, Stiff?" he asked. "That's a job, now, that'll help. Furl tops'ls tonight, and you know what it'll be gettin' the yards up. Want to try it?"

Stiff agreed eagerly. He had long regarded those idle winches with disgust, and he felt a fine scorn for the carpenter's blundering and futile attempts to get them working. A wizard in wood, was Chips, but a sorry hand on cogs or gears.

"Yes, sir," said Stiff. "I know I can fix them."

HE WENT forward, and to work, without a thought of taking his watch below. He obtained tools from the resentful Chips, and first tackled the port fore gipsy, as being the worst of the lot. It was easy, he exulted. Nothing wrong with the first, save a pin broken off in the shaft. He drilled it out with a breast-drill, and manufactured a new one with hammer and chisel. The second winch was even easier. The bewildered Chips had put it together backward, and then all hands swore because it wouldn't work. Stiff laughed with fine scorn as he reversed the gears—brave laughter considering the icy spray which drenched him, and his cold, bleeding fingers and chattering teeth. But Stiff's spirit was beyond discomfort; he was proving himself anew, and he worked like a fiend.

"Easy!" he shouted to the astonished and approving Macgowan, who came forward once an hour to watch his progress.

The two starboard winches were more than easy. He discovered they only needed a thorough cleaning and greasing. He finished the job by four bells of the dog-watch, and the mate clapped him delightedly on the back, and ordered him to the lee wheel as first reward for the work. The toil at the wheel would be almost a siesta, compared with the heart-breaking labor of the rest of the crew with the topsails.

It was a hard job, a terrible job, that furling with a tired crew. But not half so hard or long as it would have been without the winches. When it was completed, and Stiff relieved, Macgowan invited him down into the cabin for the rest of his reward.

Stiff went unsuspectingly. He was terribly tired; feeling now the loss of his sleep that afternoon, and his lurching step was not altogether caused by the ship's motion. When he entered the warm, lighted cabin, he found the captain smiling thanks at him, and Macgowan standing by the table with a tumbler and bottle in his hand.

"Here, ye are, Stiff!" said the mate. "A nice nip for the job you did for us!"

Stiff stood speechless, fascinated, watching the brown liquor pour into the glass.

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The sweet smell of it filled the cabin; Stiff breathed it in, and a million little needles seemed to prick him from scalp to feet, while he trembled with a very ague of fierce desire which suddenly swept over him. Poor Stiff—that morning he had shouted, "A fig for booze!" and now. . . .

"Well, Stiff, don't ye want it?" asked the smiling mate. "Good stuff—no rotgut, Stiff. Do you good—you look all in. Better dump it down. You'll need a bracer—it's the fores'l in the morning, perhaps. Here!" And he extended the filled glass.

Stiff hesitated for the space of a second—then he fairly snatched at it, and downed the brimming six fingers at a gulp. He stammered his thanks, made his way on deck, and forward.

The watch was already turned in, but they were wakeful enough to chorus their thanks to Stiff for his day's work, and to click their tongues thirstily when they discovered he had had a drink of the skipper's best. But Stiff returned short and surly replies to their sallies. He climbed into his bunk, and closed his eyes.

For a long time he lay there, rigid, eyes closed, hands clenching and unclenching. The watch sank deeply, and noisily, into the brief sleep of the sea. But there was no sleep for Stiff. His little house of cards had come tumbling down about his head, and he was desperate amidst the ruins. His enemy had overthrown him.

After a while, he opened his eyes, and glanced cautiously about the forecastle—the shifty, shining glances of an animal. Then, he softly turned out of his bunk, took the marlinespike that hung at the foot of Dorgan's bunk, and went softly out into the howling night.

They found him shortly after midnight, when all hands and the cook were called for the battle with the foresail. Stiff missing? Every pound of man-power was needed this hour, so Mister Macgowan lost no time in commencing a hurried search. He went snooping forward into the gloom beneath the forecastle head, carrying a hurricane lamp. The boatswain's locker had been pried open, he discovered; inside he found the Stiff, dead drunk, sprawling upon a pile of gear, with the opened shellac can by his side, and the marlinespike, with which he had lifted the paint ball from his beverage, still clutched in his hand.

The mate swore briefly, bitterly. Just like a Stiff, he said. What could you expect of a thrice-cursed Stiff? He kicked the Stiff heavily, but the latter was far too drunk to heed.

"The blankety blank swab! Here—lay hold o' him, a couple of hands, and lug him aft!" exclaimed Macgowan.

They carried him aft, because, as the mate remarked, the foc'sle was likely to be presently full of water. No sense in drowning a hand—even a drunken Stiff—when they were so short-handed. They carried him into the sacred precincts of the cabin, into the alleyway, and paused before the inner door to the sail-locker—which room was in the fore starboard part of the poop. Then, with a ho-heave-ho, they heaved him through the doorway, upon a snaky coil of canvas.

XI

TWO A. M., but it was not dark. Above the storm pall, overhead, the Arctic midnight sun was shining. Its light filtered dimly through the awning of cloud; a ghastly, pallid light suffusing a world in chaos—wild wind, wild sea, and the laboring ship.

The strength of the gale had increased since yesterday, as Captain Barnes had foreseen, and feared, and hoped against. But his faith in Luck seemed ill-placed this time. The gale came screaming upon them with such added force that a man must crouch, and claw his way along in the teeth of it. The huge seas racing up astern seemed more huge, more eager to overtake. Ahead—somewhere—the ice!

It was high time the foresail was reefed. It buried her head, was a very real danger, strained the mast, and threatened to rip the stays out of her. High time it was reefed—and at eight bells, midnight, Captain Barnes had reluctantly given the order.

Now, at two o'clock, the battle with the mighty sail was still on. It was a battle royal, a free-for-all that engaged the whole company. Both watches were there on the great yard, and Sails, and Chips, and Cooky, and Steward. Even the little pimply-faced cabin-boy was aloft, doing his puny best. Blinker Price was there, at the leech, as befitted a bucko of standing. Dorgan heaved and strained his great muscles at the bunt, his voice bellowing the ancient chant of the yardarm—

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Ai, hai, hai, oh-o,
We'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boots.

The gale tore the words from his very lips, and they went hurtling away on the wind. They reached his fellows on the yard only as a faint, thin echo—but an encouraging echo. They reached and heaved with the measure of the chanty, and skinned her up another foot.

Every soul on board was battling there on the foreyard, save only the captain and mate, who were at the wheel, and the Stiff, lying drunk in the sail-locker.

It was a losing fight they fought with the hurricane wind. It seemed to the desperate men aloft that the gale was playing with them, having cruel sport at their expense. Again and again they fisted the leaden canvas, skinned it up with the last ounces of their strength, and laid their bodies jealously upon the slack. Would come a puff, and their gains would be torn from them, while the gale shrieked and whistled its derision. The great sail would belly out, and flap thunderously, shaking the entire ship, nigh jerking them from the foot-ropes. Then, thin and faint, would come the Irishman's chant, and they would recommence the weary struggle. Again and again.

The two men at the wheel silently watched the fight going on forward. They did not attempt to shout their opinions of its progress to each other—that would be wasted breath. It was beyond their control, they both knew, and conceded. It was up to Luck, thought Captain Barnes. "Come, come, Good Luck!" prayed Mate Macgowan.

But, occasionally, the two men would exchange a flashing, inquiring glance—to instantly dart their gaze forward again. It was at the moments when the sail would be again torn from the grasp of the toiling crew, to belly out, and thrash. Precarious moments! The two men could feel the timbers shudder underfoot; their spurred imaginations could see the stout mast buckling and giving under the tremendous strain, could see the stays snapping, and the whole edifice come crashing down.

The mate fumbled through his oilskins for his tobacco—and paused, with the plug between his teeth. For the last time, the gale hurled a mighty puff at the ship—and the canvas, so laboriously gathered, for the last time whipped from the yard. The sail bellied out like an iron sheet. There sounded a report like artillery, which even reached aft to the wheel.

The mate spat out the plug, and the taste on his tongue was not tobacco—but Death. He watched the swift enactment of the tragedy with comprehending eyes. Their Finish—his Finish! He found and gave voice at last. He knew his captain was giving voice, also, though he did not look at him; giving voice to the same words. There is but one call for the supreme moment—"My God! My God!"

For the heavy, iron truss which secured the foreyard to the mast, had snapped, given away at some flaw which the strain discovered. The yard swung wildly, held only by lifts and braces, and all the spar above was buckling, and bending forward.

A great, despairing cry came cutting through the gale to the pair at the wheel. They saw wire cable and manila rope snapping like pack thread. The yard swung to port, then back to starboard—and sailed away to leeward, with its canvas, and its clinging human freight, disappearing in the scud and sea.

The two men had a fleeting glimpse of the up-tilted end of the spar—but their gaze was aloft. All the fore hamper was coming down. From the top, up, it was inclining forward, all the masts and spars, and falling slowly, gracefully. The main was going, too, and the mizzen. The two men braced themselves for the final crash, the parting gear volleying above the gale, and telling them what was coming.

The ship seemed to stop dead. Instinctively, the pair turned their heads, and looked over their shoulders.

A huge, slaty sea rose up astern. Up, up, it towered, high above the taffrail, a vast, moving wall of water. Its crest leaped forward, and arched above the two men's heads. One glimpse they had of the green irradiance in the heart of that gray mountain, then—it fell.

XII

THE Stiff thought he was dead. He seemed to be numb, without feeling, from the neck down. Only a single, tiny spark of half-reason seemed to be alive, somewhere in the depths of his heavy, stupid head. It told him he was surely dead.

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Then, a flip of cold water upon his face startled his eyes open. He found himself staring at a big roll of canvas, a foot or so distant from his face—and upon the coil of the sail was perched a big ship-rat, who stared down at him with beady, unwinking eyes.

Stiff sat bolt upright, very suddenly, and decided he was very much alive. The rat scampered higher up the hill of canvas, and recommenced his inspection of the man. The man became abruptly aware that he had been lying, and was now sitting, in icy, black sea-water. When he moved, the pain of the blood freshly pumping through his frozen veins prickled him wide awake.

Stiff made painful shift to scramble after the rat. The latter dived out of sight, and Stiff seated himself on the spot the rodent had vacated, high and dry on top of the piled sails, and looked about him. Undoubtedly he was alive. Daylight, pouring through the two ports, dimly illumined the little room. He was in the sail-locker! How came he there? What was wrong?

Then came crushing memory. Stiff bowed his head in his arms, and wished to Heaven he were dead.

How long he sat there, a huddled, suffering wretch, he never knew. Time had ceased for Stiff; everything had ceased, save pain. His soul, so recently exalted by a sense of hard-won worthiness, was mired in a bottomless bog of self-abasement; an abasement so cruelly complete that he was conscious only of his utter vileness. His soul admitted no extenuation of his offense—he had broken his covenant, he had again lost his manhood! It was the bitterest time of Stiff's life; he hid his face even from the blank walls of the room. He sat there with bowed head for long moments, perhaps long hours—and each swift-passing second seemed an age-long agony to him.

He sat there long enough for the rat to overcome his fright, and emerge from his hiding-place. And several other rats came out of their separate hiding-places and joined the first. They were nervous, distracted rats. They ran down the side of the pile of canvas, and sniffed at the black water circling the base; then they scampered back up again, squeaking loudly. It was evident they were marooned upon this island of sail. Evident, also, that they were hungry, for they gnawed at the seizing around a projecting staysail hank. They circled warily around the heedless man, grew bolder, and nibbled at his oilskins, and his sea-boots.

A sharp, stinging pain abruptly jerked the Stiff out of the abyss of despair and into the passing moment. Coincidentally, the involuntary flourish of his arm hurled the rat the length of the room. He leaped half erect, and saw a dozen or so of the loathsome creatures disappearing into the recesses of the pile underfoot. He lifted his smarting hand to his mouth, and looked about him with observing, and startled eyes. For the rat had bitten him on the bare hand.

As Stiff crouched there, sucking the wound, looking about, he became, for the second time since waking, possessed with a sense of disaster. A fresh disaster, quite apart from the other crushing and ruinous event of his drunkenness, a disaster which bore on others besides himself, on his fellows, on his ship! Something was wrong with the ship! What had happened?

He was in the sail-locker. Well and good; a fit place to dump a drunken stiff. But there was water in the sail-locker, a full foot of black sea-water sloshing over the floor. The clear space at the forward side of the compartment was a lake, upon which floated the sailmaker's bench, and stool, and several of his fids. Stiff's roving eye rested upon the inner door of the room, the door that let upon the cabin alleyway. The door was closed tight, but through the cracks by the door's edges water was streaming.

Stiff stared unbelievingly at the indribbling water. It was coming from the cabin, then. But how could that be? What had happened? A condition of panic was taking possession of Stiff. Something terrible had happened!

He listened. For weeks, his ears had been attuned to the howl of the gale aloft; waking or sleeping that mighty sound had been with him. Now, he suddenly missed it. Had the gale, then, blown out? He heard faintly the moan of wind without. No, the wind was undoubtedly blowing out there—but where was the mighty whistle of it through the rigging? And the sea—what had happened to the sea?

Stiff became aware that there was hardly any motion to the ship. By rights she should be climbing up and sliding down great wave-mountains, rolling, pitching and laboring. She had been so doing a few

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hours ago. But now—she might be anchored in some landlocked harbor for all the motion to her. Where was the wild, leaping sea he had last looked upon? There came to his ears the sound as of a great surf beating upon a distant beach. But as for motion—the sea the ship rested upon seemed as calm as a mill-pond. Occasionally, she did lift a little—and Stiff noticed that she lifted sluggishly, unwillingly, like a log long soaked.

Something was fearfully wrong, Stiff knew. He listened anxiously for the trample of feet on the deck overhead, for shouts, for sounds from the cabin. Nothing. Just the slosh of the water and the squeaking of rats, there in the sail-locker. The stillness of death seemed upon the ship. It was uncanny, terrifying!

STIFF suddenly jumped down from his dry perch, into the water. He assaulted the door leading to the alleyway; he turned the knob, and yanked, and when the door would not open, he banged upon it with his clenched fists. No use, the door was locked. And, though Stiff did not know it, the key was in the pocket of poor Macgowan, and Davy Jones had taken Macgowan long hours ago. Stiff pounded upon the door, and shouted himself hoarse. A few moments ago he was dreading ever having to face a fellow man again—now he longed with all his frightened heart and soul to hear a footstep, and a human voice, however gruff.

He thumped and shouted, but nothing came of it save an increased spurt of water through the cracks. Finally he quit his efforts, and clambered up on the pile of sails again, thus displacing the rats, who had come out to watch him perform.

Stiff watched the disappearing rodents with a shudder, and the bitten hand went to his mouth. Then he sat down, and stared with wild, red-shot eyes at the resistant door. What was the matter out there? Why didn't they come? Were they all deaf? Or dead?

Dead! Chill premonition gripped Stiff's belly. *Dead?* God—were they? And he—locked in the sail-locker! To become food for the rats; to starve—and thirst—to death!

Thirst! Stiff was conscious of thirst. The aftermath of his drunk, and his shouting, had quite dried him up; his tongue was swollen and woody. Never had he felt so thirsty—it was torture.

But there was a difference between this thirst and the other post-debauch thirsts Stiff had experienced—though he was much too troubled to notice it. Heretofore, when coming out of it, he had wanted whisky. This time he craved water. No chip from the old block, no hair from the dog's tail, this time. He thought of water, cold, clear water, whole pails of it.

But he did not think of his thirst overlong; he was far too panic-stricken by this sense of disaster to the ship. He wanted to get out of the sail-locker.

Suddenly, he commenced to curse himself for a stupid fool. He left his perch again, and plunged into the water—but this time he waded forward, toward the door in the forward bulkhead, the door that let upon the main deck. He could negotiate this outlet, he knew; it was secured from within. It had been battened shut at the beginning of the gale, and he had helped old Sails do the job.

Stiff was too overcome by his dread, and his horror of his imprisonment with the rats, to even hesitate at what he knew was a serious offense against sea discipline—opening a battened door without orders. He grasped a heavy sailmaker's fid that was floating about at his feet, and with it he hammered loose the six canvas-covered wedges. Then he lifted out the bracing bars, and flung open the door.

He looked, aghast, upon a scene of ruin. He had expected to see something calamitous, he knew not what—but this? He sat down upon the door-sill, weak and unnerved, and gazed along the decks with unbelieving eyes—Good heavens, was this the ship?

She was a wreck. Before his eyes was the mainmast, gone at the crosstrees, with a mass of dangling spar and gear. Forward, the jagged stump of the foremast stuck up a few feet above the house. The starboard bulwarks were gone in the waist, a wide gap, and through it Stiff could see ice—ice stretching seemingly to the horizon. The sun was shining in a blue, cloudless sky, but fresh-fallen snow covered everything on board. It enhanced the utter desolation of the scene, this white mantle; she seemed to be some old derelict, abandoned long years to the elements, instead of a vessel whose ruin had been accomplished but a few short

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hours. So altered were the familiar outlines of things that the agitated Stiff could hardly recognize them as belonging to the *Sequoia*. Involuntarily, he thought of the tale of Rip Van Winkle, and absently felt of his chin.

There was no life! That was the fact that slowly took possession of the Stiff's mind. No life—that is why the ship looked so dreadful. No voices, no footfalls, no smoke curling out of the galley funnel. Why, the ship was—Great God, she was deserted!

He leaped to his feet, and ran forward, his feet marking the unmarred white carpet. Twice he stumbled over snow-hidden obstacles, and sprawled headlong, but he was not even conscious of falling.

"Oh, God, they have abandoned her—they have abandoned *me!*" he cried aloud.

He gained the house, and checked his headlong flight. The forecastle door swung open. He peered within; his heart seemed to stop its beating at the sight of that dank and cheerless interior. There was nothing living within the forecastle; nothing there save the empty, yawning bunks, and a wild confusion of bedding and clothing. The place was half-filled with water; on the starboard side—toward which the ship listed—the water was level with the top of the water-guard affixed to the door-sill, nearly waist high. Stiff saw Dorgan's sea-chest floating there, and his own donkey's breakfast, swum out of his bunk, and one of old Donald's spare sea-boots sailing aimlessly about, as though in search of a leg. But the living being he craved to see was not there.

Stiff drew back from the door. He stared wildly about, stared forward at the vast jumble of wreckage jammed beneath the forecastle head, stared aft at a scene as desolate, stared abroad, and saw ice stretching away to the horizon on both sides. Not a living, moving thing did his eye observe in the whole frozen vista. Alone! Panic seized him afresh, and he ran aft as blindly as he had run forward, shouting as he ran.

The ladders to the poop were gone. Stiff clambered upon the rail, and hoisted himself to the quarter-deck.

As deserted as forward was this part of the ship. But the ruin did not seem so complete. The mizzenmast was gone, with all its gear, snapped some six feet above the deck. But the skylights were apparently intact, still covered with the heavy storm tarpaulin. Stiff gave the empty deck no more than a glance. He ran for the companion-hatch.

One of the narrow doors of the hatch had been burst open; it hung awry, by a single hinge. Stiff slipped through the opening, and started to descend to the cabin. His heart gave a great bound—there was a light burning below.

The cabin-lamp, hanging in its chains above the great table, he saw, as he continued his descent. But—the light was all. No spark of life was burning in the cabin, no familiar face greeted him, no voice cursed him for a drunken dog. The cabin was deserted like the forecastle; filled with water like the forecastle, too, on the starboard side. Stiff stood on the port side, on the dry space of deck, and looked around.

The daylight filtered through the ports in the half-round, aiding the light of the lamp. Stiff saw that the second mate's room had been gutted by the sea, that all the loose furniture of the place bobbed in the flood at his feet. Behind him were the captain's and the mate's rooms, doors closed, evidently dry. Stiff did not investigate. He knew they were empty of life. He was alone. Alone! The thought was intolerable, maddening! He sprang for the ladder, and rushed on deck again.

He went forward, and prowled up and down the snowy decks like some distracted animal. Finally, completely wearied, he came back to the door of the sail-locker, and sat down on the sill.

HE BEGAN to curse his shipmates, in a wild voice, for going off and leaving him behind, lying drunk and helpless. Then, he checked his outburst against his fellows, and began to curse himself. Left him? Yes; and a perfect right they had to leave him. What was he, to burden a laden boat? A Stiff, a useless, drunken misfit, not to be trusted. He was less than a man, less than a beast! They did right to abandon him. They should have flung him overboard, instead of into the sail-locker. He wished to God they had!

Then, his eye happened to encounter a boat davit, and he brought himself up with a jerk. The davit was twisted like a corkscrew, and the fall was gone. He looked at the other davits, port and starboard; they had all four been wrenched and twisted. He investigated the heap of wreckage in the

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starboard scuppers—it was wreckage of the two life-boats.

Gone—yes, but not by the life-boats! He stared forward, to where the third boat the ship carried was berthed on top of the deck-house. There it was, with the end of a spar sticking up through its smashed bottom. The maintopgallant-yard, he afterward found it to be, fallen with such force as to drive through boat, and roof, and penetrate the galley.

The intelligence that the crew had not used the boats in leaving her, brought Stiff to his feet again, to rove the decks. 'Way forward, in the scuppers, he found a large chunk of iron—a piece of the truss that had secured the foreyard. He recognized it. He looked at the ragged stump of the mast. The foreyard truss! He guessed what had happened. He was not much of a sailor, but he knew how much depended upon that iron band, he could understand what would happen if it gave way during a gale. There was to have been a battle with the foresail, he knew. And with all hands, practically, on the yard, and the truss breaking. . . .

Oh, he had been left behind, right enough. They had gone—gone to their deaths, while he had been drunk! The bitter irony of it, thought Stiff. They who loved life, had died, while he, who asked for nothing better than a clean, fighting death, had been spared. And how? By getting drunk!

He looked aft, and beheld the ruin with newly comprehending eyes. Masts gone, bulwarks gone, roundhouse gone, boats gone—he could see it now, that huge boarding sea that had swept the poop clean of life, and filled and flooded the ship. But he could not see why she had ever come up again, why succeeding seas had not smothered her.

He thought he understood the miracle that saved the ship from foundering, when, a moment later he climbed up on the forecastle head, and from that elevation surveyed his surroundings.

This was Stiff's first studious outlook on the ice; hitherto he had been too agitated to reasonably geographize his position. He saw that the wreck was lying in a little bay that indented the edge of a vast field of Arctic ice. The *Sequoia's* head, he judged, was pointing south. Astern, and to port, the ice stretched unbroken beyond vision, beyond the horizon; not a level plain, but an upheaved chaos of ice, with ridges, and valleys, and upthrust pinnacles in uncountable profusion.

To starboard, however, Stiff could see, miles away, the westward limit of a large section of the field. Here, a huge arm of ice projected south from the main body. Beyond its outer edge, he saw the sea, black against the white of the ice. The heavy wind of the dying gale came out of this quarter, zipping over the ice, cutting him to the very marrow. It was a wild, raging sea over there, he guessed; he could plainly hear the thunder of the surf against the ice wall, the same thunder he remembered hearing in the sail-locker.

Ahead, about a mile away, the little ice-locked bay opened to another sort of sea, a sparkling blue sea, covered as far as he could see with floating floes, large and small. A heavily running sea, this to the south, but nothing like that raging main to windward. The water of the bay was flat, calm; only at long intervals a low, oily surge came rolling in, to which the hulk raised sluggishly.

"Full of water—slowly sinking," Stiff remarked aloud.

But this thought did not even stir his pulse; nor did he even think of sounding the well. What was the use?

STARING over the ice, he thought he knew how the ship came to her present haven. At the very moment of the dismasting, she must have been upon the ice, upon the point of that projecting arm to windward. But, instead of being flung against the ice cliffs, to crumple like an egg-shell, some freakish ill fortune had swept her around the point, to ride on a comparatively smooth sea, sheltered by that giant breakwater. She must have drifted into her present position, he decided. . . .

Ill fortune? Cruelly ill, thought Stiff, that fortune which had preserved his useless life. And to what fate? To perish miserably in the frozen, desolate world of starvation, or cold, or thirst? No! Better, far better, his own hand should write the period. He stared over the white, lifeless field, and a sense of awful loneliness took possession of his mind. His thought commenced to form into a purpose.

But the thought of death by starvation, awakened his mind to his bodily needs. He was more than half frozen, famished for food, and his thirst came back with

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redoubled force. Mechanically, so wretched he almost failed to anticipate comfort, he left the forecastle head, and went to the galley.

The galley had escaped the general ruin, he noted, dully. With the exception of the roof, through which the top-gallant yard projected, the place had escaped damage. The stove was intact. He got fuel from the fuel box, and kindled a fire with stiff fingers.

The water in the cook's butt had a skin of ice on top. Stiff broke through it, and quaffed a big pannikin of the icy fluid, and another, and another. It vastly refreshed him; never had he tasted anything so good. His thirst relieved, his hunger became more impatient.

He dined on two cans of beans and some hardtack he discovered in the galley. He fed the blaze in the stove liberally—the stove grew red hot. Stiff thawed in the warmth, ate his beans, sipped water, and thought upon his condition.

The blaze might thaw his frozen flesh, but it could not thaw his icy despair. Not a single ray of hope illumined the depressing gloom of the situation.

"What is the use?" asked Stiff. He was on an Arctic ice field, hundreds of miles from the nearest human habitation, he thought, with black winter approaching. The wreck was full of water; after a while, she would sink beneath him. As to that, though—he thought he could pump her dry, by means of that plan that Macgowan had frowned upon. But—what was the use?

What, indeed. He would still be marooned on this icy waste. The ship would undoubtedly soon be crushed to pieces. And if he did make a fight for life? If he pumped her out, rigged some kind of sail and worked her out of this bay, to try and win south—why, what then? What if he were picked up?

Why, he decided, bitterly, it would only mean that a drunken, nameless *stiff* was rescued. A life saved that was useless to the world, and to himself. Back in the cities of men, and he would again become "Souse," would again sink into the pit of degradation, out of which he had so painfully climbed these past months.

"Not that—better death!" cried Stiff.

No going back, now. He had flung away his chance for a can of shellac. The thought of his misadventure with the shellac tortured him more than the thought of the lonely ice field. He had made a pact with himself, and staked his manhood upon the pledge. A can of shellac had seduced him! His self-hatred was complete as he thought of it.

He could not go back. That bright vision he had amused himself with these latter days, the vision of himself, clean of body and mind, returning to his father's house to live again with the honorable name of Kane, was gone for good—banished by shellac. What was the use of making pledges to break them? He had fought his fight with Barleycorn, and Barleycorn had proved he owned him body, will and soul. That ended it.

If he had a companion, any living, friendly thing to keep him company, Stiff argued, it would be different. He would fight for another, when he wouldn't lift a finger to save himself from the rest of death. But he was alone, oh, dreadfully alone! In all this icy world were only himself, and the squeaking, slimy rats in the sail-locker. It was this thought of his terrible loneliness that decided him finally. He could not bear to live with himself, with this misfit of a man he so bitterly hated. He decided to kill himself.

How? He thought of various ways of sloughing this life he considered himself unfit to preserve. Of hanging, which he discarded as uncertain and lengthy; of jumping over the side into the icy water—he feared his weak flesh would cause him to swim, and thus prolong the agony; of a shot. He applauded the thought of shooting. That was the way! Quick, final, certain. He would shoot himself.

He remembered once seeing a revolver hanging over Macgowan's desk, in the mate's berth; he had glanced through the open door, as he went to the steward's pantry to draw slopchest goods. He had no doubt the revolver still hung there—if not, there would surely be firearms in the captain's room.

So, this desperate Stiff left his warm seat in the galley, and stepped out upon the cold deck, intent upon suicide. This fresh view of the desolate, snow-covered ruin of the ship, and of the wild, barren wastes of surrounding ice, made him flinch. "Alone! Alone!" the wind seemed to moan in his ears.

He strode aft hurriedly.

"I am wise to end it," he told himself. "I would go mad alone in this place."

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A moment later he was in the cabin, staring at the closed door of the mate's room. Inside, he knew, was a pistol. For a moment, he hesitated, and stared around the cabin as though in search of somebody, something, to lift the crushing weight of lonely despair from his shoulders. But the cabin could not cheer him; its wrecked and deserted appearance was as despressing to the beholder as the forsaken, empty world outdoors. He shrugged his shoulders, stepped to the door, and opened it.

A small, furry object, very much alive, leaped out of the mate's room, and started to climb Stiff's leg, exclaiming delight and frenzied appeal. It was the cat.

XIII

THERE are rare, purple moments when some great, unhoped-for joy overwhelms us. Each of us knows at least one such moment—it is like a lightning flash against the drab background of life. The lover knows, when the coy, uncertain maid at last says, "yes"; the graying clerk with the growing family knows, when, answering the inner office summons, and expecting dismissal, he is greeted by the boss with a raise and promotion; the mother knows, when she sees her sick babe take the miraculous turn for the better; the discouraged prospector knows, when, before deserting the claim, he takes one last stroke with the pick, and uncovers the treasure. At such a moment, reason departs, and emotion has full sway. The joy is keen as pain, and we greet it much as we greet pain —with shouts, or tears, or prayers, or curses—never with laughter.

The Stiff was knowing such a moment. He sat down on the cold, wet cabin floor, hugged the mewing, squirming cat, and shouted in a loud, but broken, voice:

"Oh, Kitty! Oh, Kitty! Oh, Kitty!"

The terrible depression of a moment since was fled, his broken shout throbbed with a great thankfulness. The idea of self-destruction which had possessed him, was, in a twinkling, clean erased from his mind. He was *not* alone! That was the revolutionizing thought that transformed him. Here, in his arms, was something friendly, something alive—he could feel the thump-thump of the little beast's heart against his hand.

This cat was more than a mere pet to Stiff. She was an old, and tried, friend. She was the first friend of his sea career. At the commencement of the voyage, when he had been the despised roustabout, Kitty was the one living thing on board that ignored the coventry to which he was consigned. She had been friendly—and she had wrapped her little, furry form around his lonely heart. She had heartened him that painful night of his rebirth. It was not the Kane way to think lightly of any kind of friendship, and even after he had become Dorgan's chum, Stiff continued to lavish affection upon the animal. At this moment he was almost as delighted to hold her in his arms, as he would have been to feel a human hand upon his shoulder, and hear a human voice. So—no wonder he sat on the floor, and shouted:

"Oh, Kitty! Oh, Kitty!"

Kitty was impatient. Something beyond delight at meeting her friend, beyond hunger, excited her. She muzzled Stiff's cheek with her cold nose, purred brokenly, and commenced, again and again, a passionate mewing. She struggled against Stiff's hug. Finally, she squirmed free, leaped to the floor, and dived back into the mate's room. She paused for a second, in the doorway, and looked back at Stiff, and her mew seemed to invite him to follow.

He followed—hurriedly. He was panic-stricken by the sudden desertion, by the fear of losing sight, even for a moment, of the cat. He scrambled to his feet, and lurched through the doorway, in pursuit.

It was light in the mate's room—daylight came through the ports, and lamplight through the door. Stiff saw Mister Macgowan's bunk, disordered, blankets thrown back, just as Macgowan left it when last he turned out. He saw the revolver he had come aft to get, hanging in its leather pocket, on the bulkhead, above the bunk. But neither bunk nor weapon made any impression on his mind—he was looking for his friend.

He heard her loud purr—then he saw her. She was perched on the edge of a wooden box that was lashed to the foot of the bunk, well off the floor. She looked into the box, then up at the man, then into the box again. Stiff, seeing, suddenly remembered why Macgowan had taken puss aft at the beginning of the gale, to share the safety and warmth of his berth. So, it was with expectancy, that he stepped to Kitty's side, and looked into the box.

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Macgowan had warmly padded this little home with old clothes, and a blanket. Inside, on top of the padding, Stiff saw five tiny kittens. Their eyes were still closed, their legs as yet too weak to uphold them. They slid around the bottom of the box on their bellies, and wailed thinly for their mother. They were evidently cold, for one and all shivered violently. Their little mother was heedful of their plaintive cries; she stepped down into the box, and curled her body protectingly over the litter. Then she looked up at Stiff, with proud, glistening eyes, and talked to him with little, trembling, questioning mews.

Something took hold of Stiff's heart, and squeezed it, and the contraction brought, not the light of pain, but the light of tenderness to his eyes. He was staring at the ever strange and awesome miracle of motherhood.

He reacted to the sight much like a father viewing the new baby—the same compassionate half-smile trembled on his lips, the same lump grew in his throat, and, quite unknown to himself, the tear ducts opened, and two big, salt drops rolled down his face and dropped into the box. He felt as he would have felt had it been an infant in the box, and a human mother lifting her face to him, beseeching aid, instead of a handful of blind kittens.

Indeed, the mother cat seemed to become articulate. Stiff understood her speech, her broken purrs, her whines and mews. "You see? You see?" she seemed to ask him. "My babies—you see? They are cold, I am hungry. You must help." Stiff leaned over, stroked the proudly arched neck and answered her as though he reassured a human being. "All right, old girl. Cold, are they? And you hungry? All right, all right. I'll look after you."

The cat rubbed her sleek head against his hand, and purred a thankful reply. It was evident to Stiff that she understood him, and accepted his promise at face value. Kitty would worry no more about warmth for her young, and food for herself—her friend would supply both. She readjusted her position, and gave her whole attention to mothering her babies.

Her actions said so plainly, "It's up to you, Stiff—get busy," that Stiff commenced to chuckle. "You are a shameless old hussy!" he told the cat. "Here, you wish a family, and the responsibilities of fatherhood, upon a blushing bachelor, without so much as 'by your leave?' Well, all right, Kitty. First duty, I guess, is to get the lot of you into a warm place, before those poor little mites shiver themselves to death. For it *is* cold here."

It was. Stiff was suddenly conscious of the cold that pervaded the half-flooded interior of the cabin space. It was a bitter, clammy, penetrating cold, a damp chill that soaked through him. Shortly before, he had warmed and dried himself before the galley stove—more recently, his mind had been in too great tumult to heed temperature—but now, that he thought upon it, he found that he, himself, was shivering like the kittens, and his teeth were clacking together. He thought wishfully of that glowing stove forward.

To think was to act—he drew his sheath knife, and cut the lashing that secured the box to the bunk. Then he covered the little family with a thick blanket, snatched from the bunk, and carefully carried the precious burden out of the cabin, and forward to the galley.

Kitty purred loud approval when she felt the warm air of the galley. Deserting her progeny, she fell voraciously upon the slim remnants of Stiff's meal.

"Just a moment, old lady, and I'll get you supper," admonished Stiff. He generously stoked the stove, and went aft again.

Went aft with the same hurried stride as before—but with what different feelings with what different thoughts! Then, he had been intent upon death, now, he was intent upon life. The snow-covered wreck was still a dreary sight, the dreadful chaos of ice still stretched to the surrounding horizons, its barrenness lighted by the cold glow of the midnight sun, but this wild vista had lost its power to make Stiff flinch. Indeed, he never thought to look at the scenery. He was no longer alone, with the leisure to gloom over his fortunes; he had a family on his hands, to protect and cherish and provide for. Death was the farthest thought from Stiff's mind.

He entered the cabin this time with senses alert, and with his mind functioning coolly and reasonably. The first thing he noted was that the oil in the lamp was consumed. The rancid smell of the burning wick filled the air. He extinguished it; then, seeing that the ports illy lighted the interior, he went up on the poop and stripped the

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tarpaulin off the skylights—darting glances hither and thither about the deck, as he worked, cool, planning glances that noted what was wrecked and what was intact.

The removal of the tarpaulin flooded the cabin with daylight, and the place looked not nearly so cheerless or ruined when Stiff again descended below. He waded the length of the alleyway and, with a fire-ax he lifted from the bulkhead, knocked out the battens that secured the door that opened upon the main deck. The flood commenced to pour out upon the snow-covered deck. He thrust his arm into the icy water and felt for the draining plugs he had seen the cabin boy remove when washing the cabin deck, and finding them, jerked them out. He was confident now that most of the water would drain off, the balance he could bail out later.

Next he went to the steward's pantry—on the port side, luckily, and dry—and addressed himself to the task that had chiefly brought him aft, the securing of food for the cat; and for himself, something to supplement his scanty meal.

Provisions were in abundance in the pantry, and he knew there was a lazaret full of stores beneath his feet. No need to stint or starve. He gathered cans of condensed milk, good cabin coffee, a loaf of cabin soft-tack from the cook's last batch, and a tin of corned beef.

This armful he carried into the mate's room and deposited upon the bunk. He had bethought himself that warmer clothing would be welcomed by his chilled body, and he recalled that Macgowan had been about his size. Warm clothing he found aplenty, including knee-length, knitted socks, and a fine pair of pilot boots. Also, a pea-coat. This last hung from the same nail that supported the revolver, over the bunk. To obtain the garment, Stiff lifted the weapon—and tossed it carelessly aside, with never a thought of the use he had intended to put it to not half an hour ago. He had no time to waste mooning upon the peace of death—he knew that Kitty was yowling for his return. He bundled his loot inside the mate's bedding, and carried the lot forward.

It was a fine feast that was presently enjoyed in the galley. It was a loquacious meal. Stiff, warmly clad and toasted by the fire, tackled his bread, meat and coffee in fine spirits, and told his plans to the cat. Kitty lapped her milk and replied. The five kittens tumbled contentedly about their warm lair, and addressed the world in general. Stiff could hardly recall a more satisfying dinner.

Finally, when he had banked his fire, and spread his bed upon the fuel box, he addressed his companion in concrete terms.

"A little sleep, Kitty, and we'll be fit to tackle the job. We'll be busy enough tomorrow, old girl. This old tub is about half full of water, I guess, and we'll have to get her empty before she takes a dive from under us. Well, don't worry, Kitty. That boiler isn't damaged, and we'll just try the scheme old Macgowan laughed at. We'll show 'em, Kitty. We'll get her dry, and then—we'll see. Don't worry, girlie—I'll get you and your babies safe out of this hole, see if I don't. I'll take you back to where the grass grows."

Kitty squatted on her brood, with just her head showing above the edge of the box. She regarded Stiff steadfastly, with shining eyes, and pondered gravely upon his words. She seemed quite satisfied.

XIV

STIFF slept like a dead man for some half-dozen hours. Then, the cat, hearing and sensing danger from afar, came out of her box, and danced up and down his recumbent form, snarling and whining her fear.

Stiff sat bolt upright, wide wake, the disturbing sounds reaching his startled ears. It came from without, from a distance, this sinister medley of noise, and it was steadily growing in volume, as though approaching. There was a tremendous grinding sound, there were other sounds that resembled the explosions of a near-by battle, the cracking rattle of rifle fire, and the booming of big gun salvos. Stiff was dazed for an instant—then, he understood.

"Holy smoke—the ice!" he ejaculated.

Kitty, seemingly terrified by his sharp exclamation, hopped back into her box, and cowered, silent and shaking, above her litter. Stiff rolled off his bed, pulled on his boots, and hurried out on deck.

A moment later he was aft, on the poop, gazing with consternation at that portion of the ice-field that lay astern of the ship, and on her port side. He was witnessing for the first time—though not the last—the alarming

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phenomenon of ice pressure. The whole ice world in these quarters was in convulsive motion, as though being rended by some long-lived ice-quake.

Immediately surrounding the ship, the ice was as solid and age-old appearing as yesterday. But, commencing at an irregular line some half-mile distant, the jumbled ice-scape was remodeling itself before his very eyes. Hills disappeared, as though a giant hand had plucked them from sight; other hills shot up to replace them. Long ridges melted away to valleys; valleys became ridges. He saw huge blocks of ice, weighing tons, he knew, hurled bodily into the air. Shattering, crashing, grinding noises accompanied this travail of the ice, and roared in his ears.

The commotion reached its height at the exact moment Stiff reached the poop. In a few moments it began to subside, or rather, to move away, for Stiff could follow the retreat with eye and ear to the very horizon. Finally, came the last faint boom to his ears, and accustomed silence descended upon the field. The newly fashioned outlook in the wake of the pressure seemed as stable and enduring as though it had existed since time began.

Stiff was frightened, badly frightened. That play of mighty, elemental forces before his very eyes had been like a book page, whereon he had read his probable finish, and the finish of his friends, and the ship. Yesterday, he had with apathy thought of the possibility that the encircling ice might close in and crush the ship. He had not been much interested in the speculation, then, because he had not been at all interested in the problem of living.

This morning it was different. Companionship, food, and sleep—and recovery from the after effects of his debauch—had transformed the Stiff. Life ran strong in his veins this morning. He was determined to live, to escape. And—being crushed by the ice, from being a speculative possibilty, was become an actual probability, almost a certainty. The thought of being caught in such a screaming, grinding, smashing maelstrom of ice as he looked at, brought a light of terror to Stiff's eyes.

Stiff knew little about the habits of ice fields—no more than a few scraps of doubtful knowledge gleaned from forecastle gossip. He had, for instance, always supposed that an Arctic ice-field was an expanse of congealed water as flat on top as a table. The mountainous pack ice that surrounded him filled him with astonishment. He knew nothing of the tidal movement that caused ice pressure, but he remembered hearing Dorgan, who had made whaling voyages, speak of pressure as an event that occurred regularly amidst the ice. Dorgan had evinced much respect for pressure. Stiff had not understood at the time—but he understood now, very clearly. If this ghastly upheaval he had just witnessed was to come back again, and again, it would be but a matter of time ere it reached the ship. Then—but he would rather not think of "then."

"I'll get busy," said Stiff. "I'll get busy right away. No time to waste in this place."

He got busy immediately, by commencing a more comprehensive and critical survey of the wreck than he had yet attempted. It was necessary to know at once, what obstacles he must overcome, what would aid and what would hinder his plans.

Being on the poop, he started his investigation in that quarter. He climbed out on the half-round, and endeavored to inspect the rudder. It seemed intact to his eyes. He climbed inboard again, and tried the wheel. It spun easily. This discovery more than pleased him, but it also puzzled him. He could not account for the vagaries, the evident partiality, of that tremendous sea that had swept the ship. It had exhibited, reflected Stiff, the same insane humor of a Kansas cyclone, which wrecks one dwelling and spares the next. Here were the easily damaged rudder and steering-gear intact, while the much more stanchly constructed binnacle was smashed flat.

The skylights had withstood the deluge, the cabin hatch had lost only half a door, but forward at the break of the poop, the solidly constructed rail was gone altogether. Gone, also, were the poop ladders, the extension bridge and its stanchions, the standard compass. But Stiff recked little of this damage. He walked forward elated with the knowledge that he could steer his ship when the time came.

HE PAUSED at the mainmast. Upon this, the remaining stick, depended much of his chances of escape from the ice. This would be the seat of the propelling power.

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He was well satisfied with his survey of the mast. It had, as recounted, gone by the board at the crosstrees — the lower mast, and topmast, remained. The lower rigging stood, but he saw he must stay the topmast. As for spars, the lower topsail-yard remained in position, as did also the great main-yard, though the latter had snapped a lift and cockbilled itself. The upper topsail-yard was dangling at the end of its running-gear, held chiefly by the chain sheets, and the double gaskets around the furled sail.

He climbed to the top, and made a closer examination, the mechanical corner of his mind busied with strains and stresses, and ways and means. He could do it—no doubt about it! He could make sail, all right. But he would have to rig some kind of jury-mast forward, for a head-sail. He promptly decided the hanging upper topsail-yard would do very well for a foremast.

When he reached the deck again, he sounded the well. He had been reassured when he first rushed from the galley that the ship had not settled much during his sleep. She seemed as high out of the water as yesterday, and when the oily surge caused by the pressure rolled under her, she lifted no more sluggishly than yesterday. He knew that the butts the gale had started, had closed again. He knew she was full of water, but he thought she must be leaking very slowly now, if at all. When he sounded the well, he found eight feet, two inches, in the hold. Bad enough, but not so bad as he expected.

When he reached the forecastle head, he found himself facing the problem of mooring his home. When he stood here the day before, he had been too agitated to observe what prevented the hulk from drifting about the bay, or scraping her sides against the ice. Now, he saw.

The lower end of the foretopmast stay—a wire rope—was still fast to its bull's-eye on the bowsprit. The line stretched out from the bows, across some thirty yards of water, to a jutting promontory of the ice-shore. The other end of the stay was fast to a tangled mass of wreckage, and this wreckage had jammed behind the outthrust mass of ice, as a result of which the vessel was held almost stationary, only drifting a narrow arc within her own length. Stiff perceived immediately that sooner or later either the stay would part, the wreckage be torn loose, or the ice crumble, under the tremendous strain. The first job for him to tackle must be the proper mooring of the ship. He would tackle it, he decided, as soon as he got power on the donkey.

Kitty's voice, declaiming in no uncertain accents, brought Stiff, from his initial contemplation of the boiler, back to the galley. Kitty, he found, had quite recovered from her fright. She was feeding and washing her young, and asserting vehemently her own desire for nourishment. Stiff poked up and fed the smoldering fire, warmed her milk and his own breakfast, and, after the manner of man cut off from his kind, discoursed aloud concerning his plans to the animal.

"It's going to be a tough job, Kitty," he said. "But we'll do it all right, old girl. 'Never say die,' that's our motto. First thing to do, is to get steam. With steam, Kitty, we can do things; we'll have a fine, husky crew that never gets tired working for us. Then, we'll just haul the old tub up to the ice, and tie her up so she won't run away with us. Then, we'll tackle that leak. Some job, that, Kitty! But old Mac's ghost will turn green with envy when he sees how we manage it.

"And after we've pumped the old hooker out, Kitty, we'll get some sail on her, and waddle away from this frozen hole in the wall. And when we reach that blessed land where the grass grows, and the sun goes to sleep at night like any well-conducted body, I'll buy you a cow for your own consumption, Kitty, and also make you a present of the biggest, blackest, stoutest old tomcat I can lay hands upon. Eh, doesn't that take your fancy, Kitty? I thought it would. And if he beats you, lass, I'll grant you divorce."

So spoke Stiff while he wolfed his food, and his spirits were as bright as his words. He carried his bright humor to his labors, and sang while inspecting the boiler.

He was on certain ground when engaged with this task; he had practical knowledge of donkey-engines, as well as a sure mechanical instinct. The season he had spent in the Washington lumber camp, he had operated a donkey of this very type, and had become remarkably expert in its handling.

The *Sequoia's* boiler was housed in the forward compartment of the deckhouse—which compartment also contained the carpenter's work-bench and tools—and the engine was just forward of the house. A door,

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opening forward, admitted easy and instant communication between the two. Stiff found that both boiler and winch were in first-class condition; all he had to do was fill the boiler with water, and kindle the fire beneath it—which he immediately proceeded to do. He had been prepared to discover the water in the feed-tank—which was situated on top of the house—frozen, but found only a thick slush on top.

But Stiff decided to take no chances of a sudden drop in temperature. His first employment after lighting the fire was to replace an elbow in the steam line with a tee, and lead a half-inch pipe through the roof and into the tank. He figured that a steam jet thus constructed would not only prevent his feed-water freezing, but would also save fuel by sending the water warm into the boiler. He discovered that there was a connection between the feed-tank and the fresh-water tanks in the hold, which though it must be laboriously worked by hand, would enable him to replenish his feed at will.

Concluding the construction of the jet, he commenced preparations for the mooring. The problem of ice anchors nonplussed him for a time, then he thought of the heavy, hooked, chunks of iron termed "devil's claws," that were used on occasion on the anchor chains. They would grip and hold, he was sure. They would do for the breast and stern lines. He would use the wire stay for a bow line.

He fetched two three-inch mooring lines from the sail locker, where they were stored, and bent them to the pennants of the devil's claws. Then, disposing his lines upon the deck, he was ready to heave in to the ice.

It proved not nearly so difficult a task as he had anticipated. When he had a head of steam, he clapped a stout tackle upon the bight of the stay that was already fast to the ice, led the hauling part of the tackle to the engine, and gently heaved in upon it. His great fear that the jammed wreckage would come free under the great strain, proved groundless. His bow line held; the heavy water-filled hull moved ahead at the urge, and once she had gathered momentum in that placid mill-pond, she moved of her own accord across the short intervening space, and gently butted her nose against the ice.

Stiff gathered up the slack of the bow line and belayed it on the bitts. Then, he made a heaving line fast to the ice anchor of his stern line, dropped over the bows on to the ice, and, hauling the heavy iron after him, dragged it over the ice to a crevice he had spied from the deck. This was a really terrific effort, for the iron and the rope made a heavy weight, and the ice underfoot was slippery and uneven.

He jammed the claws of his anchor into the ice crack, and scrambled back aboard. The devil's claw gripped firmly, as he had expected. When he started the engine, and heaved short, the stern of the ship swung obediently inshore. Stiff ran aft and belayed the line on the after bitts.

The rest was child's play in comparison. He led out his breast line, made sure the bow line would hold, got fenders out of the boatswain's locker and hung them overside so the ship would not scrape against the ice, and, finally, freed two painters' stages from their lashings under the forecastle-head, nailed them together, and thrust them out through the gap in the bulwarks, to act as a gangway.

BY THIS time, Stiff was quite prepared for a brief rest. Strenuous labor performed in a cold, bracing atmosphere has the certain effect of sharpening the appetite—when Stiff secured his gangway, he was thinking wistfully of dinner. He did not know the time of day, but thought it must be near noon. While steam had been making in his boiler, he had busied himself aft, in the cabin, and had discovered that both the chronometer and the cabin clock had run down and stopped. This intelligence might have dismayed an experienced sailor, but it made little impression upon Stiff—he would not have been able to work out his position in any event. He reflected that his stomach would keep him accurately informed of the passage of time.

During that brief visit aft that morning, he had discovered that nearly all the water had drained out of the cabin—what remained, he bailed out in a few moments. He decided to move his family and bed to this region of the ship. The advantages of such a step were obvious—the cabin stove would consume less fuel, the stores would be handy, and the mate's bunk, or the skipper's soft bed, would be much more restful than the narrow perch he had slept upon last night, in the galley. So he built a fire in the cabin stove, and left the place to warm up and dry out.

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When he finished his mooring, he sounded the well—he had sounded several times during the morning, and obtained a good idea of the leak's progress—and then he carefully carried the box of kittens aft, Kitty, herself, prancing friskily at his heels. He placed the box in a warm niche behind the stove, and prepared his own, and Kitty's meal. Kitty sat down on his knee after lapping her milk, and listened carefully while he reported to her, his morning's labors.

"Everything has gone all hunky-dory," said Stiff. "We are safely tied up, Kitty; we are hiding from the bad winds and the bad sea behind a nice stout ice wall—a dandy breakwater, it is, old girl. A nice clean job, a 'shipshape and Bristol fashion' job, as old Macgowan would have said, and it has left us as snug as a bug in a rug.

"Now for the leak, Kitty! We'll tackle that just as soon as I finish my smoke. Not so bad, Kitty—eight foot eleven, a gain of nine inches in about seven hours. Expected worse. But, it means hustling, Kitty! When we commence, we'll have to keep right on till we have the pumps working."

But before he left for the deck, he knelt down beside the box, and, to the mother cat's evident pride and pleasure, lifted up each squalling mite, solemnly inspected it, and gently caressed it.

"They are certainly plump little rascals," he assured the cat. "I can truthfully tell you I have never encountered healthier infants, Kitty; nor infants who sang better, or wriggled more energetically. I suggest that you cultivate their singing gifts. I am sure I detect both soprano and tenor tones. Just think, Kitty, of your progeny gracing the concert stage, or the opera, when we reach the green-grass country—Well, work time, old girl! My work is outdoors, but your work is right here, in this box, cuddling your babies. In with you! So—good-by."

And Stiff left the warm cabin, brushing his eyes with the back of his hand.

Stiff was not reasoning concerning his attitude toward this cattery he had adopted. He was only feeling. He was as completely careless of his own life as a man could become, but he felt that in laboring for the safety of the helpless kittens, and their equally helpless mother, he was performing the decentest act of his hectic life. He felt that he was, in a way, atoning for all his sins of omission and commission. This feeling was becoming an obsession.

He was immediately hard at work. He remained hard at work for forty-eight hours. It was no light task, this harnessing of the pumps to the donkey-engine.

This is the problem which confronted the Stiff:

More than a hundred feet of deck separated the donkey-engine from the pumps. He must bridge this gap. Moreover—the difficult feat—he must connect in a workable manner the *rotary* motion of the engine with the *up-and-down* motion of the pumps.

This was Stiff's plan for bridging the gap and trasnmitting his power, the same self-evolved plan Macgowan had scoffed at:

He would fasten iron rods to the niggerheads (revolving drums) of the engine, one rod to the after side of one niggerhead, the second rod to the forward side of the other niggerhead. These rods, he conceived, would perform the duties of crank-pins, as upon a locomotive—indeed, it was Stiff's knowledge of a locomotive's workings, gained by looking at them during his hoboing years, that fathered this idea—to these two rods, or crank-pins, he would fasten ropes, lead them aft through snatch-blocks, and fasten them to the pump-arms.

Then, thought Stiff, he would start his engine, one crank-pin would move forward with the revolving niggerhead, dragging its rope, and pulling one pump-arm down; while the other crank-pin, moving aft with its niggerhead, would slacken its rope, and permit the other pump-arm to go up. Continuation of the revolution would reverse the pump-arm motion. Stiff could close his eyes and see it—the pump-arms wagging up and down, up and down, clang, clang, clang!

Very simple, very easy. But not so easy to put into execution as to tell about. Stiff labored for two full days, without once lying down to rest. At intervals he went aft, attended to the cat's needs, stoked the stove, and wolfed his own food. Then, back to work. It was a race against time. The water steadily rose in the hold, and the vessel settled perceptibly, especially by her head. Stiff didn't know when the swamping mark would be reached, at what moment she would sink beneath him. So, he worked desperately.

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MANY difficulties beset and delayed him, besides the to-be-expected difficulties of the task, itself. The boiler required frequent attention. He did not dare let the fire die out beneath it; the water in his feed-tank would freeze if he did, and besides he wanted steam for any emergency that might arise. It was bitterly cold. And the sun, whose twenty-four-hour light he had depended upon, was abruptly and completely shrouded by a fog, a typical Arctic ice fog, chill, clammy opaque. Stiff could hardly see a dozen feet. He placed lighted lanterns about the deck, and their suffused rays became his landmarks.

The problem of fuel for the boiler also raised itself. There had been about half a ton of coal in the boiler fuel box, and a couple of hundredweight in the galley. Stiff knew there was coal in the fore-peak, several tons of it—he had had the dusty duty during the voyage of providing the cook with the black diamonds he needed—but when he attempted to reach this store of coal, he discovered it under water.

He immediately decided to save the available coal for banking purposes, and for cabin use. He would keep the boiler going with wood. There was wood aplenty, but a wood fire required more frequent stoking, and the additional labor with an ax. Stiff burnt the wreckage about the decks first, then tackled the bulwarks, commencing where the section had been carried away on the starboard side.

Thus it was that his Idea took concrete shape more slowly than he expected. He had the carpenter's tools to work with, and material aplenty to work upon. He found his "crank-pin" sections in a couple of spare stay-rods belonging to the boiler, one-inch iron rods some four feet long. He sawed them to suitable length and drilled a quarter-inch hole in one end of each rod. Next, he took hammer and chisel, and laboriously chipped V-shaped notches into the rims of the niggerheads. Then he bedded his rods into the notches, and lashed them immovable with a round seizing.

His crank-pins ready, he turned his attention to his connecting lines. He had determined that wire rope would be better than manila for this purpose, and a search uncovered a coil of five-eighth-inch cable in the boatswain's locker, a cable, moreover, that had been used, and had had the "give" stretched out of it.

Stiff overhauled his lengths, and severed them from the coil. Then he spliced eyes in the ends that were to go over the crank-pins, fitted the eyes with thimbles, slipped them over the rods, and prevented their coming off with washers, and iron pins he made to fit the quarter-inch holes he had drilled in the outer ends of the rods.

He had now to properly lead his lines aft. He hooked snatch-blocks into two ring-bolts at the outboard sides of the amidship decks. The snow on the decks had frozen to ice; he had to chop the ring-bolts free, and the snatch-blocks had to be thawed out before the boiler before the sheaves would turn. From amidships, he led his lines to snatch-blocks hooked into the ring-bolts beneath the pump-arms, and from the blocks up over the arms. The ends he took to the capstan, and heaved taut.

He cut the ropes at the required place—where they came over the arms—and spliced and thimble-rigged two eyes, as he had done forward. These, he slipped over the pump-arms, and prevented their slipping by lashings. Lastly, he took two watch-tackles, hooked the standing blocks into stirrups on the main-yard, hooked the other blocks over the bights of his cables, and hauled taut. This took up the little remaining slack in the cables.

Stiff was now ready for the try-out. The imminence of the test banished his weariness. The drag left his footsteps as he hurried forward, along the fog-shrouded deck, to the engine. Of course, he was sure it would work! What inventor is not sure? But—there is always the "but."

So, it was with heightened pulse, and an unspoken prayer for luck, that Stiff cracked the throttle, and warmed up the engine. From his position, he could not see his rigging stretching aft, or the pumps—the fog concealed them. He must depend upon his ears for good news or bad. He opened the throttle a trifle more. The niggerheads began to slowly revolve.

"Clang!" came the sound of a pump-arm coming down; *"clang!"* followed the other arm a second later. Then, like measured hammer strokes in a boiler works, *"clang, clang, clang, clang."*

Working! Stiff seized a lantern and ran aft. Working, to be sure. You could have heard that working ten miles away. The winch groaned harshly as it slowly turned around, the cables sawed raspingly to and

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fro, the snatch-blocks squeaked, the pump-arms wagged steadily up and down, making a tremendous racket. The pandemonium was a delicious symphony to Stiff's delighted ears. It worked! There, gushing out upon the deck, was a four-inch stream of water, sucked up out of the flooded hold!

Stiff swung his hat in the air, and whooped. He jumped up and down, dancing stiff-legged like a Hottentot warrior, to the syncopated medley of his invention. His shouts brought the cat to the cabin alleyway door, where she scratched and meowed inquiringly. Stiff threw open the door, and seized the animal, and commenced a dizzy gyration over the after deck, a shouting madman hugging a squalling, scratching, terrified cat. He danced and sang until his feet suddenly went out from under him, and he sat down upon the ice-covered deck hard enough to jolt the breath from his body and his wits together. Kitty dived back into the warm safety of the cabin, and Stiff went soberly forward.

He was very tired. He felt even more fagged than he used to feel in the old vagabonding days, when he would pass twenty-four hours, or more, "decking it," or riding "the rods," on a railroad train, where his life depended upon his constant wakefulness. But in those days, when once he alighted, there was always a warm sandhouse, or other shelter, to resort to for a long sleep; in those days, moreover, he could depend upon the transient strength that came out of a bottle.

This time, he had been awake for more than forty-eight hours—and must keep awake. Donkey-boilers do not stoke themselves; he must feed the fire constantly, with the quick-burning wood. He must also watch his invention work, and observe if the pumps gained upon the leak. He had no doubt they would. He resolved to pump the ship dry, or nearly so, before shutting down and turning in.

After he had wired his throttle-valve so it would neither work further open, nor closed, he went aft, and brewed himself some coffee. Coffee was a good beverage to keep awake on, he reflected, but it could not equal whisky for putting life into weary limbs. Stiff had not thought wishfully of liquor since the episode of the shellac, but the reaction that followed upon his long, hard labor caused him to think of liquor now. But not exactly wishfully. He desired a drink, but was glad he could not get one. He tried, quite successfully, to banish the thought.

Before he went forward again, to commence his long vigil, he bethought himself that a blanket to wrap around him while sitting in the boiler-room, would be a capital aid to comfort. Because the captain's berth was nearest to where he stood, he opened the door to this room—opened it for the first time—and stepped within, intending to get the blanket from the captain's bed.

The rays from the cabin lamp darted ahead of him into the berth. They divided the murk, and fell, as with intention, upon Captain Barnes's desk, lighting it brightly.

Stiff caught his breath, and paused with one foot over the threshold. There, in the center of the illumined desk, wedged between two books, stood a quart-size whisky-bottle!

XV

IT MUST be the same bottle from which Macgowan poured the potent draft the last night of the great gale, thought Stiff. He stood by the desk, holding it in his hands. It was two-thirds full, and as he tilted it this way and that, the dark contents surged to and fro, and he imagined he could hear a faint, enticing gurgle. His eyes glistened, his tongue unconsciously rimmed his dry lips. Oh, but the Stiff felt thirsty!

He stood quietly, with slumped shoulders, a hollow-eyed, haggard-faced man, with deep lines of weariness carved about his mouth, and he fought the hardest fight of his life. While he fought, he gently stroked the cold, smooth surface of the bottle with his palm.

It was civil strife. Stiff warred with himself. Nor was it just a battle between body and mind. Stiff's body had been purged by hard work and clean living; though he did not notice it, his body no longer responded with the old greedy readiness at the sight of a bottle. He did not this time feel that tingling of nerves from head to toe.

But his mind had not been purged. Habit is the most invulnerable of weaknesses. For many years it had been Stiff's habit to foster and nourish an alcohol lust that was ever stimulated by a clamoring, whisky-soaked body. This habit of mind

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was still alive. The maggots of desire still infested his brain, though his body was clean, and tormented him with a thirst that was none the less strong for having no physical basis.

So, Stiff wished, with all his mind, to lift the bottle to his lips, and, paradoxically, wished with all his mind, to cast it down untasted. Habit urged him to drink, and took subtle advantage of his physical exhaustion in urging. Memory, shame, ambition, resisted habit.

So completely did the struggle absorb his mind that the world of things ceased to exist. For the moment, he was deaf to the clangor of the pumps, heedless of the need to attend the boiler, not aware of the presence of the cat, who was rubbing against his leg. The world, at that moment, consisted of a bottle and a man, and the man was of two minds.

No, the man was of three minds. One mind espoused the cause of the bottle. The second mind stubbornly combatted the first. The third mind seemed detached from the struggle; it sat aloof in judgment. It informed the Stiff—this third intelligence—that this was a crucial moment of the long war, and that his immediate act would mean final victory for this side or that. Did he lift the bottle to his lips, he would continue to lift bottles to his lips forever. Did he set it down untasted, he would be able to continue setting down bottles untasted. Victory for one side meant stiffhood, for the other side, manhood.

Stiff blinked his bloodshot eyes at the bottle in his hands. He was distracted. It was such an easy, natural act to lift it to his mouth, such a difficult, unnatural act to put it down uncorked. He studied the label on the bottle. It was a paper of shiny white, with glittering, gold letters, and a picture; a seductive label that would make any stiff's tongue swell. "Blue Grass Special," the lettering said. Beneath, was a portrait of a Blue Grass gentleman, a jolly, wide-smiling, twinkling-eyed old fellow, in the act of raising a brimming glass of the "Special" to his mouth. "A drink for the gods," was written below the picture.

The bibulous part of Stiff's nature reached out and embraced the merry fellow on the label, gathered him in as a reinforcement, put words into his mouth to confound the Stiff.

"What you need is a good, stout nip," said the Blue Grass gentleman. "Why do you hesitate? Surely you have earned a nip! You know how much good it will do you. You know what life it will put into your tired limbs. You know how it will prop open your red, smarting eyelids. Come—be sensible! You need not make a fool of yourself. Take a drink for a bracer—no more. Think how it will taste! A drink for the gods!"

"But not for men," muttered Stiff.

"Come, now—no ranting!" smiled the Blue Grass gentleman. "You know I am for men. You know I do men good at times—such a time as this. I do not ask you to be swinish—just a nip to strengthen you, and no more. What is the matter with you? Are you afraid?"

"You know what is the matter with me!" said Stiff. "No single nip—all or nothing with me. You know that! I am a stiff. *You* made me a stiff!"

The coaxing note became less in the Blue Grass gentleman's voice, and he became subtly insolent and commanding. His words had the ring of truth to the half-willing Stiff.

"You admit that I own you body and soul, when you call yourself a stiff. Then, why struggle against me? 'All or nothing,' you say. Why not take 'all'—it is better than 'nothing.' Consider—you have one chance in a thousand of ever getting out of this hole you find yourself in.

"If you do escape—what then? Back in civilization, you will still be a stiff, still be 'Souse,' the drunkard. Once a stiff, always a stiff! Always, I shall possess you, torment you. If you do not escape—what? A miserable death here in the ice! Is it worth while, Stiff? And why are you fighting me, you fool! Because of a mawkish, silly sentiment concerning a cat and some squalling kittens! Do you dream that a box of whining beasts can loosen my hold upon you, transform you into a man? Be sensible. Lift me up and guzzle me dry. One last, merry hour, Stiff! Afterward—the gun still hangs above Macgowan's berth!"

It seemed that the Blue Grass gentleman had carried the day. Before his cogent argument the opposing forces were tongue-tied, impotent. Quite unconsciously, Stiff's left hand was plucking at the cork in the bottle. The old hunted-animal look came into his face, and he cast shifty glances

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about him, as though fearing interruption. He even turned around and stared into the cabin.

He suddenly stiffened, and his fingers fell away from the cork. His other hand gripped the bottle savagely, as though gripping the throat of the Blue Grass gentleman. He was transfixed by a scene enacting that instant in the cabin.

IT WAS no dread apparition, no ghost of a dead shipmate come to revile him, no reproachful shade of his father. It was a scene with a living character, one of the objects of his mawkish sentiment. One of the kittens had clambered out of the box, enticed to an adventure of exploration in this strange world its eyes had newly opened upon. It had wandered too far, and become lost. Now, it crouched just outside the door, a terrified little fluffy ball, wailing piteously. That thin, frightened cry stabbed Stiff's heart like a knife-thrust.

The mother cat left off her rubbing against Stiff's leg, and, whining tenderly, leaped through the doorway to the kitten's side. She took her babe in her mouth, and, instead of taking it to the box, carried it into the captain's berth, and deposited it at Stiff's feet.

The incident bore the aspect of a miracle to Stiff. He was awed. A controlling hand, he felt, had sent this mewling mite out of the box at the very instant he was uncorking the bottle, had impelled the mother to bring it to his feet. Come to plead with him! The cat sat on her haunches and stared gravely and questioningly up into his face. The kitten likewise regarded him—but not so gravely. The kitten appeared to decide at once he was trustworthy. It climbed up on his boot, and confidingly curled up there.

Stiff stared down at the kitten on his foot for a long moment. Then he slowly turned his gaze upon the bottle, upon the smiling Blue Grass gentleman.

"By Heaven, *no!*" he shouted.

The gentleman remained silent. His smile seemed contemptuous, derisive, as though he were certain of ultimate victory, and disinclined to further bandy words with a rebellious slave. Stiff gritted his teeth at that smiling face; oh, how he hated the gentleman!—And how he loved him!

He raised his arm, as though to cast the bottle upon the floor. Then, his mouth suddenly hardened—he lowered his arm again, pulled out the cork, and seized the glass that sat in a rack on the desk.

"You say, 'Drink'!" he addressed the Blue Grass gentleman. "All right—I'll drink! I'll show you. I'll *show* you!"

He tilted the bottle, and the liquor gushed into the glass. The sweet, pungent breath of the drink assailed his nostrils, and started into writhing, biting life the maggots of desire in his brain.

"This is the way I'll drink it," said Stiff to the Blue Grass gentleman.

He turned his wrist, and slowly spilled the liquor upon the floor.

His jaw muscles knotted, and the sweat glistened on his forehead, as he watched the glass empty. It was the hardest thing he had ever done. He could more easily have launched himself overboard, or waded a river of fire, than pour that whisky on the floor!

He set down the glass and carefully recorked the bottle. Then he held it up, and addressed the Blue Grass gentleman in the same exultant, chanting strain the revivalist uses to defy the devil.

"You saw? You saw me drink? That is the way I'll treat you! You owned me—now I own you! Do you hear? I am my own man! A *man!*—do you hear? You have done your worst—I can laugh at you now! Torment me, torture me—I want you to! And I'll pour you on the floor!—I'll get out of this place—do you hear? Get back among men, to the cities, where I meet you at every corner—and I'll *laugh* at you! I *know*. You have played with me—now, I'll play with you! Some day I will not even *want* you! I know—I *know* that day will come! And when that day comes I'll be Robert Kane, my father's son, again! And *you* will be my servant!

"Oh, I fooled you, didn't I? You thought you had me when I filled the glass! But I poured it on the floor—do you hear? You thought I was going to dash you down and break you! No, no! I'll not run away from you—I am a *man!* I'll keep you, I'll cherish you! And when you tell me to drink, I'll pour you underfoot!—*Oh, God be thanked, my chains are broken!*"

His wild tirade had driven the cat and kitten, affrighted, into the cabin. Stiff placed the bottle in his pocket, and followed them. He had spent five minutes in the captain's berth.

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XVI

SOME eight hours later, a sharp, crashing noise caused the Stiff dozing in the boiler-room, to throw aside his blanket, and rush out on deck. He thought his precious invention had met with mishap, but no, the pump-arms still clanged steadily up and down.

While he stood by the pumps, the noise came again. It came from the ice, a long distance away. Stiff knew that the dreaded ice pressure was again upon the field. The single, warning note was repeated several times; then came the same battle-sounds he had before heard, the rumblings, crashings, grindings, faint at first, but swelling louder and louder into a great thunder, and approaching nearer and nearer.

He could not see anything. The fog interposed an impenetrable veil between him and the seat of the uproar; it was so dense he could hardly see the ice-wall against which the ship lay moored. This blindness made the event the more dreadful. He had a vivid recollection of the cataclysmic scene the other morning when the pressure gripped the field. This time, he stared into the gray void, and with his mind's eye beheld the hideous convulsion of the ice. He knew that great bergs were being ground to powder, blotted out of existence in an instant, that the solid ice was being ripped apart and jammed together by some mighty, uncontrollable force. The clamor was deafening, he could no longer hear the pumps. Plainly, the pressure was this time coming nearer to the ship. The end was at hand, felt Stiff. Momentarily, he expected the ice alongside to rear up and fall upon him, smashing him and the ship, as a descending hand would smash a fly.

So strong was this sense of impending doom, that he ran into the cabin and carried out on deck the box containing cat and kittens. He had some vague notion of leaping with the box, somewhere, somehow, to safety, when the crash came. The cat crouched upon her litter, shaking and voiceless with fear. Stiff crouched over the rail, and waited.

There came a loud, rending crash, and then a tremendous splash, somewhere close by, on the farther side of the promontory. The ship lifted to a sudden wave. Stiff knew that a huge block of ice had been hurled into the water—the next one, he thought, would be hurled at the ship.

But that near-by explosion of force had been the climax of the pressure. The noise commenced to retreat, grew less and less with distance, and, finally, a curious, distant moaning was all that reached the listening ears.

Stiff waited till the last, faint sound died away; then he slowly relaxed his tense attitude, and drew a long, relieved breath. Kitty, finding voice with the departure of the thunder, began to yowl questions, and getting no answer, leaped from the box to the rail, and thence to Stiff's shoulder, where she cuddled, trembling, against his cheek.

"Phew!—that was a narrow squeak, Kitty!" said Stiff. "Too narrow. We don't want to be here when the next one comes. We'll have to get some kind of rag on the old box, and hike out of this place. We can kiss ourselves good-by if we don't hustle. I'd like to start the job at once—but I'm all in. Must get some sleep, Kitty."

He carried the box back into the cabin. Then he sounded the well, and found less then three feet of water in the hold. Whereupon, he shut down his engine, banked the boiler fire with coal, and went aft and turned in all standing, upon the captain's bed. He was instantly deep in the drugged sleep of exhaustion.

While he slept, the fog lifted as suddenly as it had descended three days before. When he came on deck twelve hours later, he discovered himself in bright sunshine. The rest had put heart into him, given him a new lease of life; the sight of the sun completed his cheer. It was with a whistle and song that Stiff went to work.

He sounded, and found the leak had made about two and one half feet while he had slept—there was something more than five feet of water below. He was well pleased. At this rate of leakage, he thought that about six hours' pumping a day, three hours in the day, three at night, would keep her reasonably free of water. He went forward, got up steam, and started the engine.

Next, he set about discovering the result of the ice pressure upon the surrounding field. The mass to which the ship was made fast blocked the view from deck, so he ascended to the maintop. He saw that the configuration of the field to the eastward was radically different from what he remembered of its former appearance. He saw that a veritable ice-cliff had been piled

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up on the other side of the promontory by the pressure.

There was a respectably sized ice island afloat in the bay; he decided that it was the launching of this island that had so startled him last night. He had occasion for thankful thoughts as he made his survey—the pressure had come close, a bare hundred yards' extension of its destructive path, and it would have overwhelmed the ship. He saw another sight, which, in particular, brought an exclamation to his lips, and a frown to his forehead.

The little bay, where the ship had haven, had yesterday been a V-shaped inlet. The pressure had remodeled this outline; the bay was like a bottle now. The shore had moved up, and made the bottle's neck. Where yesterday there had been a wide-spreading outlet to the sea, there was now a mere channel through the ice, a ribbon of water a couple of hundred yards wide.

"Great Scott, if that channel closes we're done for!" exclaimed Stiff. "We must be gone before that pressure comes back again!"

IF ANY spur were needed to send him headlong to work, it was furnished by that glimpse of the narrowed egress to the open sea. It was an unnerving thought—that the ice, there, might come together, and forever imprison him in this Arctic solitude. He had something to expect of life, now, something besides the preserving of his pets' lives urged him to the cities of men. Had he not defeated the Enemy in open combat? Was he not with ease sustaining the victory? He could go among men now, not as a stiff, but as a man—as a *Kanel*

So, Stiff barely paused to snatch a bite of breakfast, ere he commenced the task of getting a jury rig upon the wreck. He did not think this job would be as difficult as the harnessing of the pumps had been. He figured that he would be ready by the end of a day. But one man, be he ever so willing, and even though aided by a donkey-engine, can not in a day set up stays, juggle heavy spars, handle heavy canvas, and bring under sailing control the dismasted hulk of a fifteen-hundred-ton bark. Stiff, being more landsman than seaman, did not appreciate the magnitude of the task; nor did he include in his reckoning the time he must spend chopping wood and stoking the boiler, nor other, unforeseen interruptions. His day passed, and another one, and he was still at work.

At the commencement it looked easy. The main part of his rig was standing—main and maintopmasts, lower topsail and main-yards. The standing rigging of the lower mast was intact, with the exception of the forward stay; the topmast needed both back and forward stays.

He first set up the stays. For the forward stays, he used the same sized wire rope he had used for his pump cables, doubled. He drew them taut with the engine, and clamped and seized them around the stump of the foremast. For his topmast back stays he used some stays that had belonged to the fore and mizzen topmasts—they had parted at the heads, and were still fast to the channels. He set them up from the main channels to the head, and easily tautened them with the turnbuckles.

He next turned his attention to the lower topsail-yard. He had determined to use this topsail as his square sail. It would not be so difficult to manage as the great mainsail—though he thought, perhaps, he would loose the mainsail, once outside. Moreover, the lower topsail-yard did not have to be hoisted.

This sail had been showing when the ship was overwhelmed, but only a few ribbons of canvas survived that event. Before he could bend a new sail, Stiff saw he must dispose of the dangling upper topsail-yard. So, he took a tail-block and gant-line aloft, slung the yard, and, with the other end of the gant-line about the niggerhead of the engine, lowered the yard on deck.

He found a spare lower topsail in the sail locker, and dragged it forward. He had aided in shifting sail often enough to know how to proceed, though he found that for one man, it was heavy sledding. He sent the sail up with the winch, took a handy-billy aloft to use on the earings, and finally got it bent. It was by no means a pretty, "Bristol fashion" job, but he was content. It would hold, he was confident, that was the chief thing. He furled and gasketed the sail, for a sharp—and nipping—breeze had sprung up out of the north.

His inner man informed him it was food-time, and a glance at the sun told him it was—or would have been in a softer clime—night-time. As he went aft, he was astonished, and a bit discouraged, to find how much he had done during the day, and how small

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it bulked beside what was yet to be accomplished. He was very tired, but, after eating, contented himself with three hours' sleep, and then went on deck and continued his labors by the light of the night-time Arctic sun.

But there occurred one noteworthy incident during the brief time he spent in the cabin. The cabin stove had warmed the place, and before lying down upon the captain's bed, he took off his coat. As he threw the garment aside, the whisky-bottle fell out of the pocket upon the bed.

Stiff stared at the bottle with surprise; then, as the import of his surprise struck him, he sat down on the bed edge and laughed, loudly and gleefully. The happy noise brought the cat, purring, to his side. He seized the animal, and hugged her in a very ecstasy of joy. The cause of his joy was this:

He had labored furiously, all day, chilled to the bone by the cold wind, with a bottle of whisky in his coat pocket—and not once had he thought of the bottle, he had forgotten its existence!

Stiff could hardly credit the astounding fact. He, the Stiff, the Souse, had had whisky upon his person all day, and had never thought to take a drink! Of course, he knew that he would not have taken a drink, had he thought of it; he had the confident feeling he was now, and forever, master of the bottle imp. But he had not even *thought* of drinking!

He was somewhat awed by the singular circumstance. Stiff was not a reflective man; he but dimly perceived the potent workings of a fully awakened will. He was inclined to seek the explanation of his easy sobriety outside himself—a kind Providence, and the influence of his four-footed mascots of the box. The explanation was, of course, that, during the fierce struggle when he happened upon the whisky, he had, for the first time in his life, summoned to his aid *all* the scattered powers of his will. He had unified his will upon this particular issue. He had convinced himself that moment that he did not *want* to drink, that it was not *necessary* that he should drink, and the conviction, buttressed by his will, persisted.

Before, when he made the fight, he had been plagued by the craving of his whisky-accustomed flesh, and his power of resistance was further weakened by doubt of his own strength of mind. His body was clean, now, and the obsession of fear was gone. He no longer *feared* John Barleycorn. He had convinced himself that he was master of Barleycorn—and, thence, he was master. He had carried whisky with him all day without desiring to drink; even now, when he held the bottle in his hand, before his very eyes, he felt only a comparatively mild desire for the stuff.

"You're beaten! Beaten! Beaten!" he chanted at the Blue Grass gentleman. He thought that the gentleman, despite his smile, wore a disgusted and defeated air. "I've won! I don't have to drink! I don't *want* to drink!"

This was not quite true. With the bottle in his hand, he did feel like drinking. But the desire was nothing like the wild lust that had been wont to rise and storm within him at the sight of liquor. But the triumphant Stiff was in no mood to admit the existence of even a mild thirst.

"You're beaten, beaten, beaten!" he told the face on the label.

HE GENTLY stroked the cat on his lap, and his eyes became misty with tenderness and gratitude.

"You helped me beat him, Kitty. It was your victory as much as mine," he told her.

There was a reverence in his regard of the animal. Verily, the cat was an instrument of God, he felt. She had saved him from suicide; she had saved him from surrendering to the Blue Grass gentleman. He would repay; she should fare well, she and her kittens, when he returned home.

Home! The thought sprang unbidden into his mind. Home! Why, he *could* go home!

He could go home to his father's house, could look into his father's clear eyes with eyes as clear, and announce he had conquered the Enemy, and returned as Robert Kane, a man. It was not the first time since he boarded the *Sequoia* that he thought of going home, but that sweet event had always belonged to the distant future. But now, once he reached civilization, there was nothing to prevent his home-going. He knew—he did not know how he knew, but he *knew*—that he would never drink again. He had attained to mastery over himself, he controlled his appetites and passions, he had fulfilled his father's stipulation. He had won to manhood; nothing

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barred him now from resuming the Kane name and the Kane position.

It was a wonderful feeling Stiff was experiencing, this feeling that he was master of his own soul. It gave him a heady sense of power, such as whisky had never given him. It painted life with bright colors, it minimized the dread of death. Life was sweet, now, but, if it were his destiny to be overcome here in the ice, he could meet death with a courageous, fighting front. He could go out as a man, a victor in life's battle—not as a defeated stiff, slinking by his own hand from the pains and penalties of his folly.

"What a fraud you are," he told the man on the label. "You are just a bluffer, a four-flusher! You creep into a man's brain and eat up his courage. You bluff him, that's what you do! You make him think he has to serve you. *Bah!* All he has to do is really make up his mind to be shut of you—and shut of you he is. I'm shut of you—do you hear? I worked with you, and never thought of you; I slept with you, and never dreamed of you. That is how much you bluff me now! Why, I could take you out on deck, and drop you over the side, and never feel a qualm! But I'll not do that—no, no. I'll keep you with me, just to remind myself what a bluff you are. I'll take a drink of you now, just to show you."

He got the glass from the desk, and poured it full. Then he emptied the glass upon the floor. When he had done this before, it had taken every particle of his collected will to enable him to turn his wrist; this time, though desire undeniably tugged at his will, it was but weakly. He watched the dropping liquor with a scornful smile; it delighted him, gave him a sense of unbounded power, to thus pour whisky upon the floor.

He carefully replaced the bottle in his coat pocket. Then he started to search the captain's room to assure himself there was a further supply of liquor. So much pleasure did he derive from the act, Stiff was minded to continue pouring the stuff on the floor, a glassful at a time. But a couple more such "drinks" and the bottle in his possession would be empty.

He expected to find a cache. It was common gossip in the forecastle during the voyage, that Captain Barnes, who loved his regular tipple, always carried a large supply to sea. So Stiff was not surprised when he found two cases of "Blue Grass Special" in a locker. One case was full and unopened, the other contained seven full bottles. Enough for a multitude of drinks, mused the satisfied Stiff, as he turned in.

When he returned to the deck, after his brief rest, he at once attacked the problem of rigging his jury foremast. He had decided, as explained, to use the topsail-yard he had sent down from the main, for this purpose. First, he stripped the yard of all its gear, then, with the engine, he snaked it forward to the base of the shattered foremast. He had supposed this would be an easy job, but again his eagerness had underestimated the difficulties. The topsail-yards of a fifteen-hundred-ton ship are weighty pieces, inconceivably awkward for one man to handle, even though aided by steam.

It took time to get the lines for his fore and back stays, measure them, and attach them to the head of his spar. Also, there were the constant interruptions as the boiler needed attention, or the pumps, inspection. The sun told him it was morning, when he finally had his rigging ready, with an additional line leading from the head of the spar around the forward capstan, and back to the winch, to enable him to hoist the yard upright.

He knocked off, and had breakfast. When he started forward again, to recommence his work, there occurred an interruption and a mishap that banished from his mind for the time, all thought of the foremast.

Kitty, deserting her babes for the moment, followed him on deck, and commenced to friskily exercise in the sunlight. Stiff paused to watch her—and as he paused, his ears caught a sound that stiffened him into attention. It came from the ice, from far off, an ominous rumbling, not loud, but deep and immense. It seemed to fill the whole frozen world; while it grew no louder, it did not diminish. It was the pressure, Stiff knew. The cat knew also; she gave over her play and stood tense, ears arched forward, fur bristling, tail swelling and erect.

Stiff leaped for the main rigging, and raced aloft to the top. There was nothing to see; the upheaval, this time, was beyond the horizon. Stiff prayed it would stay there, he had no desire to see that river of churning ice come screaming toward him

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again. He wished the unnerving sound would cease.

He looked down on deck, and saw the cat dashing wildly up and down, beside herself with fear. She would try to get into the cabin, to her young, but the door was closed. Then she would leap madly around the deck. Stiff had before witnessed her terror of the ice-pressure noises. He hurriedly descended to the deck, intent upon her capture, for he feared she would leap into the water in her fright.

Before he could reach her, she did leap off the ship. But not into the water. She rushed out over the gangway he had thrust through the broken bulwarks to the ice. Then she moved, like a gray streak, over the broken ice of the promontory toward the main field. Moved like a streak, that is, for a few yards. When she reached the high ridge that separated the promontory from the main ice-body, she stopped short. It was as though the sight of that immense, frozen solitude, suddenly spread before her, deprived her of the power to move. She crouched there on top of the ridge, and commenced to yowl beseechingly.

Stiff went to her rescue, hurriedly clawing his way over the ice. When he reached the top of the ridge, he was, himself, somewhat taken aback by the view unfolded before him. The top of the ridge was as high as the maintop of the vessel, and from it the view was as extensive, and much more intimate. This was the closest Stiff had approached the main field.

Just below him, on the farther side of the ridge, was a bowl-like depression, a shallow valley in the ice. The bottom of this little valley, he noticed, was of glassy smoothness, and of perfectly clear ice.

LIFTING his eyes out of, and beyond, this valley, he beheld the white desolation stretching away before him, limitless and lifeless. The distant grumbling of the pressure had ceased, there was not a sound to break the dreadful quiet, not a moving thing, beast or bird, to relieve the awful loneliness of the scene. Even the ship was nigh hidden from him, only the mainmast remaining in view. It was a dead world he looked upon. Its dismal aspect weighed upon him with crushing force. He could sympathize with Kitty for falling into a funk, he was in a half-funk himself.

He shuddered. He picked up the cat, and turned, to go back to the happier atmosphere of shipboard.

He turned too quickly. His feet slipped from under him, and he slid on a slab of ice down the farther side of the ridge. A sharp crack, a splash, and Stiff found himself sitting up to his neck in ice water, with a dripping, terrified cat perched on top of his head, digging her claws into his scalp.

He saw that the floor of the little valley was composed of water, covered with a thin skin of ice—and he had fallen into it. He sensed this, rather than saw it. Sitting in a giant tub of ice water, with a cat's sharp claws fastened in his scalp, and the chill of the immersion biting at his bones, he could not leisurely inspect his surroundings, or philosophize concerning them, Indeed, he scrambled to his feet immediately, and, with chattering teeth, clawed his way up the ridge. Then he dragged Kitty from his torn head, and hurried—safely this time—back to the ship. But, as he did so, he was conscious of an obscure thought struggling for expression.

The thought did not crystallize until he had nearly completed shifting clothes, in the cabin. Then it suddenly popped to the front of his mind. It was such an astonishing thought to him, that he picked up his sodden, discarded shirt, and squeezed it over his open mouth, to make sure.

"By George, it was *fresh* water!" he cried.

It was, as he proved by returning to the scene of the mishap.

It was a discovery of the utmost importance to Stiff. He had been worried about his fresh-water supply. Water, upon a sailing vessel, is a scarce and precious thing. At the commencement of the voyage the *Sequoia* had two large tanks in the hold filled with water; when Stiff investigated, after starting his donkey-boiler, he found one of these tanks empty, and the other one no more than half-filled.

There was, of course, enough to satisfy his own needs for a long time. But the boiler drank from 75 to 100 gallons a day, and such consumption would rapidly dry up the supply. He had considered feeding salt water to the boiler, but he knew the corroding effects of salt water upon the boiler's insides, and he did not wish to chance a breakdown. He had but scant idea of his position; he might be weeks, even months, on the ship before being rescued. It would be

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ill fortune indeed, to have his boiler disabled, his pumps stop, his ship founder beneath him, when, perhaps, safety was but a day or so away.

If Stiff had been an experienced Arctic voyager, he would have gone out on the field and looked for a fresh-water lake. But he was not an Arctic voyager, not even a seaman; he was a landsman. Moreover, he was ridden by pressing work, without time to reason with his remaining scraps of college lore upon such physical phenomena as the effects of the Summer sun upon the ice-field. He took for granted that the ice, being congealed salt water, was unavailable as a source of fresh water. Hence, his happy surprise at the discovery. He declared his involuntary bath was a lucky mishap, and set about at once preparing means of conveying a supply of the water on board.

For a short space this problem puzzled him. Then, having steam at hand, and an engineer's point of view, he decided that siphoning, by means of a steam jet, was the simplest and easiest way.

A search brought to light, beneath the forecastle head, the remnants of the rail that had graced the break of the forecastle. This rail had been fashioned from three-quarter-inch iron pipe, and, together with other pipe he gleaned from the cabin skylight's rail, gave him the necessary length. With this pipe, some fittings, and the reel of fire hose that hung in the cabin alleyway, he fashioned his siphon. The task occupied the entire morning, but when it was completed, it worked, and he had the intense satisfaction of beholding a two-inch stream of water gurgling into the tanks.

While the tanks were filling, he returned to his former job of rigging the jury mast. During the afternoon he got the spar into position, stayed fore and aft, and securely lashed to the foremast stump. When it was completed, he got a staysail out of the sail-locker, and bent it to his forestay, and rigged halyards, downhaul and sheet.

It was late when he finished. The light of day had long since given way to the hardly less light of night. Stiff was completely tired out, but, oh, he was a proud and happy Stiff as he stood on the deck and surveyed his work. He was ready. Nothing remained but to slip his lines, and sail away to the blessed shores where the green grass grew. Even the breeze was favoring.

STIFF considered if he should attempt a departure at once. He could not get free of this cursed ice soon enough to please him. But he needed sleep, a good double handful of hours of sleep. Once outside, there was no telling what emergency would arise, or how long he must stay awake. The field seemed quiet tonight, the channel through the ice to open water was as wide as yesterday. It would be the wise course, Stiff decided, to turn in for a good sleep, and then, fully rested, take his departure on the morrow.

But before he went to bed, he spent some time over the chart that Captain Barnes had left pinned to the chart desk. He had conned over this chart before, in search of information as to his position, but it was depressingly little information he could glean from it.

The voyage of the *Sequoia* was penciled upon the chart, a thin line, with little circles, and numbered notations, to mark each day's position. Stiff followed the line with a finger—here, at 56 N. 40 W., was where the great gale fell upon them. Thereafter, the line continued, but the notations ceased. There had been no sights taken after the gale commenced, Stiff knew. This line then, had been figured upon dead reckoning. He traced it with his finger, a long, nearly straight line, running across the chart east by north, then, angling, running northeast. It ended when close to the northern point of Norway.

But the ship had weathered the North Cape before the climax of the gale, Stiff knew. The last day he had spent with his shipmates, that item of news had been the forecastle gossip. The line on the chart had not been brought to date. He tried to compute the number of hours, or days, the vessel had run before the gale, beyond the latitude of North Cape. But without success. One day, two days, three days, he could not tell.

All he knew was that he was somewhere to the northward and eastward of Norway; how far to the north and east he could only vaguely guess. As near as he could guess, by computing the number of hours he thought the ship had traveled, and the rate of her travel, beyond North Cape, he was somewhere about 74 or 75 N. and between 30 and 40 E.; that is, he was somewhere in the outer portion of that blank expanse on the chart labeled Barents Sea.

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The ice-field further complicated the situation. Stiff knew nothing about ice-fields. He saw, on the chart, curved white lines, labeled, "Summer Drift Ice." He wondered if this ice he was in was drift ice. Certainly, from its apparently limitless extent, it might very well be a section of the Frozen Sea, itself, and stretch away unbroken to the very Pole. And if the great floe was drift ice, whither had he been drifting this past week? At what speed.

Also, he wondered where to head for, supposing he got safely outside on the morrow. Here was a place called Vardo—it seemed to be nearest. But how could he know what course to lay to strike this Vardo, or coasts adjacent? . . . When he arrived at this puzzle, Stiff impatiently dismissed the whole subject from his mind. He was only knocking his head against a stone wall, he declared. There was only one course open to him, sea-ignorant and unable to ascertain his position, as he was.

He would sail south, as truly south as floating ice and wind would permit. Sooner or later, God willing, he would butt against the continent of Europe—he couldn't very well miss that. Or, more likely, if the Archangel traffic was as heavy as forecastle report had declared, he would encounter a ship. . . With which decision, Stiff went to bed.

But he did not sleep the double handful of hours, as he promised himself. Not more than a single handful of hours had passed, when the familiar cannonading from the ice brought him leaping out of bed, and into his boots, before his eyes were fairly open. Something struck the side of the ship a tremendous blow, causing the whole timbered fabric to tremble. The noises were louder and nearer than had yet been the case.

The first thing he saw, when he rushed on deck, was that both ship, and the mass of ice to which she was moored, were adrift on the bay. The promontory, so solidly attached to the main field a few hours before, had broken, or been cast, loose. Near by, on the port side, was another huge, floating cake. Stiff sensed that the great shock of a moment before had been caused by collision with this second cake. Both shores of the bay were in motion; this whole section of the field seemed in the throes of disintegration.

It was worse than the preceding pressures, and closer, surrounding him. Great cracks were appearing in the field—most of them existed but a moment before the ice ground together again, and a high ridge appeared in a twinkling. Masses were detaching from the main body, and sailing out into the bay as islands. Plainly, it was now or never, if he was to gain open water. It would be a race, and the devil would be close behind. Providentially, the favoring wind still blew strongly.

Stiff spread the banked fire of his boiler, and furiously stoked it. Then, while steam was making, he raced aloft and loosed the topsail. He set his staysail by hand, swinging his weight on the halyards, and stretching the sheet with a gipsy-winch. He had led the running-gear of the topsail forward, to belay near the engine; thus, he sheeted home his topsail with steam.

His canvas set, he cut his mooring lines with an ax, holding on to his stern line until the ship swung clear of the ice-cake. He waited till he saw his headsail filling, then he severed the remaining line, and sprang to the wheel. The ship's head slowly paid off, the staysail ballooned out, the square-sail filled, and by the wheel's kick, Stiff knew he had steerage-way. Slowly, very slowly, he crept down the bay toward the narrow outlet to the open sea.

His heart was in his mouth as he neared the channel. The ice here was not yet in motion, but the upheaval of the field was every moment narrowing the lane of water, he could see. Fine steering was impossible; he was headed for the opening, and he could but pray for luck.

The ship banged and blundered her own way to open water, scraping first one side, then the other, at no time with a dozen yards of water between her and the ice walls. The passage through the channel occupied only a few moments, but each second of these moments seemed a year to the quivering Stiff. He could see the pressure approaching on either side, and the ice creeping forward across the open space like giant closing jaws. When the ship was clear, she had not traveled a hundred yards when a loud explosion brought his head around on his shoulder. The jaws had closed, the ice come together, and the spot the ship had just vacated was a churning maelstrom of ice. It made Stiff feel sick.

So, the clipper *Sequoia* commenced her last voyage, from the icy port of Nowhere,

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to the blessed, southern port of Somewhere, with a Stiff, a cat, and five kittens for a crew, two chunks of canvas for motive-power, and a donkey-boiler to keep her from foundering en route.

XVII

MISTER JIMMY STONE, second mate of the *Florence Kane*, had the "gravy-eyed" watch. But there was no "gravy" obscuring Mister Jimmy Stone's vision this night. He was remarkably wide awake as he stood on the steamer's flying bridge, close by the engine-room telegraph, alternately stamping his feet and slapping his mittened hands against his body. He peered steadily into the thick, gray mist.

The *Florence Kane* was fog-bound, steaming at slow speed through a ghostly, hidden world. Mister Stone found nothing unique about this fog; it was just an inevitable accompaniment to Arctic Summer navigation, a visitor to be expected and endured, and made as harmless as possible by alertness and caution.

It had descended upon them with characteristic suddenness the previous afternoon, while they were making their best speed across the bight of sea that ended in the narrow entrance to the White Sea. One moment, they were in sparkling sunshine, with an ice blink in the sky to windward, and a deal of floating ice to leeward. Next moment, they were moving through a fog that Mister Stone declared he could bite chunks out of, so thick was it. The sea, with its ice, was hidden.

Thus, the reason for the second mate's unusual alertness during the gravy-eyed watch. The reason, also, for the alertness of the helmsman, of the two lookouts, posted at either wing of the bridge, of the third lookout, keeping lonely vigil in the bows. The reason why Captain Powers was dividing the night between short naps on the lounge in the charthouse, and lengthy, worried visits to the bridge.

Stone was glad the Old Man had gone back to the lounge again. He hoped he wouldn't show up again till the watch changed. An anxious skipper on the bridge makes an exasperated watch officer. The Old Man was off his base, Stone told himself, if he thought all hands would not be on the alert and keeping a bright lookout tonight. Why, every man-Jack on board knew what would happen if—

If! The bridge, the engine-room, the cabin, the forecastle, each was speculating upon this little "if." If the *Florence Kane*, while slowly nosing her way through the fog, were to nose against a chunk of the ice that was undeniably in close proximity—what then? It would be bad for the berg, and worse for the *Florence Kane*, agreed all hands, each to himself.

To ram ice was a nasty prospect under the best of conditions, but, ordinarily, a crew had a chance to take to the boats. But under present conditions, when the rammer's cargo consisted chiefly of high explosives, a few thousand tons of it, including guncotton and dynamite—well, concluded Mister Stone, if they happened to collide, it would be all over so quickly that nobody would know what had happened, and he, Jimmy Stone, would be blown nearer to Heaven than he had ever expected to get.

Every few moments, Stone would pull the whistle-cord, and the ship's siren would emit a short, sharp blast. Then Stone, the helmsman, and the lookouts, would tense themselves and listen. They listened for the tell-tale echo the ice would throw back to them, if it were near by. Since their eyes were useless, they were exploring the fog with their ears; with other senses, also, for they sniffed continuously, to smell ice, and lifted their cheeks to the wind, to feel it. It was a nervous night, mused Mister Stone. Everybody, including himself, was scared stiff, and afraid to admit it.

Except one man, thought Stone. The passenger was, he knew, sleeping quietly in his big brass bed, not ignorant of the peril, but contemptuous of it. Mister Stone permitted his thoughts to dwell upon the passenger. It was a habit he had fallen into during the voyage.

The man interested him, stirred his imagination, and Jimmy Stone had a very active imagination. He had been greatly excited, back in New York, when informed that the Great Kane, the principal owner, would make the passage to Archangel with them. At first he refused to credit the report. Why should the Great Kane, owner of a score of ships, a few railroads, banks and breweries, and Lord knew what besides, make a long, dismal trip to Archangel on a cargo boat? Preposterous!

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When he was convinced the report was true, his excitement increased. The Great Kane, he was told, was a wifeless, childless old man. Mister Stone wondered if a bright young second mate might not make an impression on a childless old man. He had just finished a yarn in which a rich old cove went journeying to find an heir, and picked up a bright young fellow, and adopted him. Now, he, Jimmy Stone, was just as bright as the chap in the story had proved himself!

But this bright vision dissipated when Mr. Kane's valet came on board. Mister Stone had seen plenty of valets on the stage, and in motion pictures—they were a race of thin, solemn, unhuman sticks. But the valet of Mr. Kane turned out to be a sharp, alert, good-looking young business man, who gave orders that this and that be done, and saw to it that his orders were promptly obeyed. Mister Stone concluded, disgustedly, that if Kane were looking for a young man to adopt he couldn't do better than his wide-awake servant.

His interest in the millionaire did not diminish though. The ship dropped down to Staten Island, and lay there for two full weeks, while a company of workmen tore the cabin space to bits, and put it together again. The second mate was awed. He had always regarded a ship's time as a sacred sort of thing; yet here was a man with power and dollars enough to lay up a laden vessel for two full weeks, while accommodations to suit his king's taste were fitted for him. Stone's idea of comfort at sea was a cozy eight by six berth—but this bloated Crœsus, it seemed, must have a suite of three rooms, and a private bathtub.

Stone, during that wait, amused himself by imagining what Kane would look like. He imagined a rubicund, hilarious old gentleman, with a diamond on each finger and three in his tie, who drank wine like lesser men drank water, and carried a roll of yellow-backs in each pocket. This was a faithful picture of any multi-millionaire, Stone was sure. Lucky fellows!

When Mr. Kane came aboard, the second mate could scarcely credit his eyes. This inconspicuous, white-haired, tired-faced old gentleman the Great Kane!

"Holy smoke, he don't look like he's worth a hundred, let alone millions!"

His interest and surprise were sustained during the voyage. The passenger actually didn't seem to know he was alive. Stone knew that the Old Man had feared the owner would try to interfere with his captaincy, as some owners have a habit of doing when cruising upon their own ships. But Mr. Kane hardly seemed to know the captain existed, or the rest of them, for that matter. He kept to himself. He passed the time brooding in a deck-chair, or pacing the lee side, or immured in his quarters—his "apartments," as Stone termed them.

As for a bright young second mate making an impression—nothing seemed to impress the man. When they had engine trouble, and wallowed in the trough of a respectable sea, most uncomfortably, for twenty-four hours, he hadn't even asked the Old Man what was the matter. And now, when they were blanketed by a fog, in the midst of ice and when the duffer knew all the particulars of the danger, he was apparently the coolest man on board. And, by George, just think of all the dollars, and good times, he must lose if they struck ice and went skyward!

Stone didn't know whether to admire or scorn the passenger. What ailed the man? Undoubtedly, he had been ill at the commencement of the trip, but now, he seemed hale physically. Then why didn't he act like a well man, give more than a "good day" or "good night" to a fellow, exhibit a little interest in his surroundings, and a decent concern for the ship's safety? Didn't the Great Kane care about life? By George, one might think the old duffer was nursing a sorrow! But then—he was plainly too old for anything like that . . . "Sorrow" and "woman" were words with the same meaning to Jimmy Stone.

"I 'EAR something, Mister!" came a hoarse exclamation from the lookout in the starboard wing of the bridge.

"Hey—what—where away?" demanded Mister Stone, his vagrant thoughts dispelled of the instant.

"Sounded like off the quarter. Kind of queer sound," replied the sailor.

Stone's hand dropped to the handle of the telegraph, and he leaned forward, his ears straining. He heard something too—kind of queer sound. What the devil was it?

He yanked the whistle-cord, and the siren squawked. There came an echo, no answering blast. But he heard the sound

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again. It seemed to be a measured clanging, and it was abeam, he thought. He opened the whistle for another blast, and another, with the same barren results.

"Confound it, why don't he answer me?" exclaimed Stone.

"What is it, Mister? Hear something?" asked an anxious voice in his ear, and he discovered the Old Man standing behind him.

The second mate was somewhat startled by the silent approach of the captain. "Old Man is certainly jumpy tonight," was his unspoken comment.

"Yes sir, heard something out there," he answered. "Queer sound. Like a screw beat, and not like one. Don't answer me—and no echo."

Presently the sound came again, seemingly from ahead, quite loud and sustained this time. *Clang, clang, clang,* it sounded to Stone like hammer blows on iron, certainly not a screw. The lookout forward reported this sound.

"Ship ahead, sir!" he sang out.

"Ship, my eye!" said Mister Stone. "That's no steamer, sir." He pulled the whistle-cord for a resounding blast, but, though the sound continued, there came no answering blast from the stranger.

"What is it, sir?"

Captain Powers delved into his memory for his reply. "The only thing I know of that sounds like that is a windjammer's pumps," he said. "——the fog!—you can't locate him. But I never heard a windjammer pumping away at that steady gait. Blast the fool, why don't he answer us? Hasn't he got something he can blat with? Give him another toot, Mister——"

"Dead ahead—*oh, God!*—hard aport!" screamed the man in the bows.

Stone jammed the engine telegraph over to full astern. The helmsman was spinning the wheel without waiting for orders, and Stone heard him muttering, "Mother Mary—Blessed Mary!" But he, himself, said nothing, nor did the captain speak.

The two officers stood passive and silent, with compressed lips, awaiting the crash.

There loomed out of the fog ahead a dark bulk of huge but vague proportions. The bulk grew nearer, larger. Mister Stone had this amusing thought: "Would the explosion lift the ship out of the water—or merely send the decks skyward?"

A ruddy patch showed in the fog near the forecastle door, as it was thrown open, and he heard the clatter and shouts of the watch below tumbling out on deck. Heard shouts on the deck abaft, too, as though the stokehold was coming on deck. The vibration told him the engines were backing.

The doom was fair upon them. The second mate watched the vague bulk transform into the general lines of a ship—a ship that was of strangely dismantled aspect, and showing no lights. "Derelict!" thought Stone. The *Florence Kane's* head was coming round. Instead of striking the stranger amidships, they would meet bow and bow. But what, thought Stone, caused that steady *clang, clang, clang,* on board that dark derelict?

There was a ripping noise forward, and a dark line moved along the forecastle rail—Stone knew it was the stranger's jib-boom, or bow-sprit, entangled with the steamer's rail. Then, the dark line disappeared, the steamer's head continued to come around, and the steamer swept past the other's bows, with a very few feet of water intervening.

Stone's fascinated eyes were staring down upon the derelict's decks. Darkened, disordered decks, he half saw—and from aft, somewhere, came that loud mysterious noise.

Suddenly, a light showed on that black deck, as a door of the deckhouse was suddenly opened—a suffused, foggy light, but one which his gaze pierced. He saw a donkey-boiler room, and a black figure framed in the doorway.

Captain Powers, behind Stone, exploded a heavy breath, cupped his hands, and sent some sulfur-tinted queries across the widening strip of water.

"What ship is that? Where are your lights? Where is your lookout? What's the matter, there?"

The black figure in the doorway seemed to be dancing up and down. A hoarse, inarticulate bellow answered the captain's hail. Then came broken cries.

"Take me off—wreck—sinking—alone—take me off——"

The light became a dim blur, the strange vessel became again a vague outline in the fog, and then, abruptly, disappeared. The men on the steamer's bridge heard, for a moment longer, the outcries. Then they ceased. The *Florence Kane* was again alone in the fog, save for the strange clanging that

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seemed to come from all directions, in turn.

"Stop her!" exclaimed the captain.

Stone rang to the engine-room. The rumble below ceased, and the *Florence Kane* lay motionless on the water.

The whole adventure, from the forward lookout's warning, to the Old Man's order, had occupied, perhaps, two minutes. But Mister Jimmy Stone felt that he was suddenly a very old man, who had lived a long, stressful lifetime. He felt very tired, and a little shaky. Also, more than a little curious.

He was suddenly conscious that the chief engineer and Finch, the mate, were on the bridge. Down forward, the watch was gathered about the forecastle door. The beggars never turned out so quickly when there was work to do, thought Stone. Behind him, on the bridge deck, he could hear Kennedy, the second assistant, cursing his stokehold watch below again, damning them for frightened boobies. The whole ship was awake—all hands up! Stone thought of the Great Kane, so frigid and unfeeling. "By George, I bet his Nibs got a jolt this time!" he said to himself.

As though in answer to his thought, he heard the level voice of the business-like valet addressing the skipper:

"Mr. Kane wishes to know, sir, if there is any necessity to arise?"

"Well, I'll be—jiggered! Didn't even turn out!" said Stone, to the man nearest him. "The blamed old icicle!"

A few minutes later, accustomed order reigned on board. The ship stood by.

"A derelict—people on her," stated the skipper. "I'd lower a boat, but it would only get lost in this fog. We'll stand by for a while, and see if it will thin. Carry on."

Whereupon, the watch below went back to their bunks, comforted by the easy philosophy of the sea, that a miss is as good as a mile. On the bridge, the skipper, and all the officers off duty, kept Stone company during the balance of that gravy-eyed watch. They stared into the fog, and guessed. They could hear the clanging noise, now muffled and distant, now close and loud, its direction distorted by the fog. Occasionally, one of them would declare he heard a shouting voice.

TWO hours later, the fog lifted—rather, it melted away, in a moment's time, and uncovered a blue, sunny sky, and a blue, sparkling, calm sea.

The watchers on the bridge beheld the cause of their recent heart-throbs. She lay some half-mile distant, the shattered wreck of a sailing vessel, very low in the water, and heavily listed to starboard. She showed a portion of mainmast, they saw, with a lower topsail illy set, and some kind of jury rig forward. Most of the bulwarks were gone from the starboard side, which faced them, and, through the glasses, they could see the pumps working up and down. Smoke ascended from the house, forward.

And in the main rigging was a man, madly waving a garment in their direction.

"By Jove, they've got the donkey on the pumps, and they're pumping the Arctic Ocean through her!" exclaimed Captain Powers. "She looks about ready to dive—no time to be lost. Stand in for her, Mister! Swing out the starboard life-boat, Mister Stone, and be ready to lower."

The steamer approached within a few hundred yards of the wreck, lay to, and lowered the boat.

"Waste no time, Mister," the captain instructed the second mate. "She's dangerously low in the water. Don't see anybody but that one man on board. Can't make out her name, because of the list."

Mister Stone steered his boat alongside the wreck. He could see the name on the listed bows, as he approached—*Sequoia*. He had his men lay on the oars, and the bowman take a turn around the main channels, with the painter.

The man who had been in the rigging, had descended and gone into the cabin, when the steamer lowered her boat. Now, as Mister Stone was scrambling aboard, he appeared again. He carried a wooden box, and was followed by a large, exceedingly sleek-looking, Maltese cat. He moved forward, toward Stone, slowly, as though it were an effort to lift his feet.

Stone was not a squeamish young man, but this fellow shocked him. His keen eye had already canvassed the cluttered decks, the strange rigging, the working pumps and the cables running forward to the slowly revolving niggerheads of the donkey-engine. These things spoke to him of some overwhelming disaster, and of strenuous efforts by the survivors to overcome it. Survivors? As Stone worked his way aft on the slanting deck, to meet the laboriously approaching stranger, he knew as if he had already been

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told that this fellow was the sole survivor. The man's appearance said so.

He was a very scarecrow, though his clothes were not tattered. His face was incredibly haggard, his cheeks covered with a stubble of beard, big blue circles of exhaustion painted beneath his eyes.

"Hello!" said Stone.

"Just in time—going under," responded the other. He spoke dully, with effort, in a half mumble.

"Alone?" asked Stone.

"Cats," was the reply.

Stone had reached his side, and suddenly discovered that the wooden box the chap so jealously hugged contained a litter of wide-eyed kittens. Discovered also, the chap was actually swaying upon his feet, as they stood facing each other. His eyes were glazed. Stone exclaimed his sympathy.

"By George, you're all in!"

"Sleepy—haven't laid down in two weeks," mumbled the other.

"Here, I'll lend you a hand," said Stone, extending his arms for the box. But the castaway would not surrender his burden. He wobbled unassisted to the spot where the steamer's boat lay.

"Got everything you want?" asked Stone. "Articles?"

"No—never thought," was the answer.

Stone lifted his eyes with surprise. He had been marveling at the ingenious pump-rigging. Bright chap to think of that! This poor devil must be one of the mates of this ill-fated ship—perhaps the skipper. But a ship's officer would have thought of the articles.

"You the mate?" he asked.

"Stiff—I'm the Stiff," said the rescued man. "No—*was* the Stiff," he corrected. "Not any more."

"Well, I'll be—jiggered!" was the steamship man's comment.

He helped this Stiff who was no longer a Stiff into the boat. Then, he made a hurried trip of inspection over the derelict. In the captain's desk, he found the articles, and in the mate's room, the log-book—Stiff had never thought to search for or examine either. He brought them back to the boat with him.

His inspection had told him the end was very near for the bark, *Sequoia;* a matter of a few hours at the most, he judged, perhaps any moment. When he returned to deck from the cabin, he discovered the pumps had stopped, though whether from clogging or lack of steam he did not pause to discover. He leaped into the boat, and ordered his men to give way.

On the short journey back to the steamer, he plied the rescued man with eager questions. The Stiff slumped in the stern sheets, eyes nearly closed, the box of kittens at his feet, and the big cat in his lap. He answered Stone but half coherently, but the tale that young man pieced together caused his lips to pucker with low whistles of astonishment, and his eyes to moisten with compassion. The poor devil had certainly been through the mill! No wonder he squatted over his cats like a chicken over her brood! Stone did not like cats, he could hardly understand how anybody else could like them, the nasty, spitting things. He guessed this self-styled Stiff was a bit balmy—he had heard a chap nearly always got a bit balmy when such things happened to him.

The boat swept in to the steamer's side. Over the bridge rail, Stone saw the interested faces of his fellows watching his approach. Even the great Kane was there, standing apart from the others, looking down with impassive countenance.

"Is that all, Mister? Only one man?" called out the captain.

"One man—six cats, sir!" answered Stone, agreeably conscious of the sensation his words caused. Cats! Fancy, rescuing six cats, in the Arctic Ocean!

THE boat drew up beneath the falls, and the blocks were smartly hooked on. They hoisted away on board, and the boat left the water. The steamer was rolling lazily to the gentle swell of the calm sea, and one of the sailors grabbed up a boat hook to fend the small craft from the ship's iron sides.

The rescued man huddled in his seat, the cat on his lap, apparently unconscious of his surroundings. His head was on his breast. The man with the boat-hook, leaning aft, struck his foot against the box at the man's feet, half lost his balance, struck his elbow against the dozing man's head, and the pole of his boat-hook drove into the cat's ribs.

The cat leaped blindly—over the side of the boat. The cast-away straightened with a jerk, his eyes open. His hands shot out to

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grasp the cat—too late, and he gave a sharp, agonized exclamation—

"Oh, Kitty!"

The cat fell into the icy sea, and, before any of the startled sailors could lay a hand on him, the man launched himself over the side of the boat after the animal.

" 'Vast—the falls!" roared Mister Stone.

He grabbed the boat-hook from the sailor's hand, and, when the man's head came up, a few feet below, he neatly hooked the fellow's collar. An instant later he was dragged aboard, all dripping, and hugging tight his dripping, half-strangled pet.

"This guy's bughouse—balmy as a jiggeroo!" exclaimed Mister Stone, as he helped lift the slumping, soaked form over the boat gunwales, into the waiting arms, when the boat had been swung inboard. "Did you see him take that header after his cat? After a cat! And look at this box of kittens!"

The rescued man's eyes were closed; he seemed to have lapsed into a coma. They carried him into the chart-house and laid him on the lounge, and moved the lounge over against the hot radiator.

"Spirits and hot blankets," Captain Powers told the steward. Then, while they were stripping the wet clothes from the fellow's body, Mister Stone made his report.

"Bark, *Sequoia*, New York to Archangel, sir. Sole survivor. Bit balmy, sure. . . . Dismasted in gale—this chap finds himself alone in ice—big ice-field. Leaking. He rigs the donkey-engine to the pumps, and gets sail on her. Left ice two weeks ago, he said, and hasn't slept since—was dozing, sitting up, when we nearly rammed last night. . . . Scraped or bumped ice getting away from the field, and the leak gained on him—she's chock-ablock full now, and just about ready to go under. . . . Strain made him a bit bughouse, I think—look at his cats! And he forgot the articles—here they are, with the log, haven't looked at them. Asked him if he was a mate, and he said he was a stiff. A *Stiff!* And he got the pumps going, and sail——"

The man on the lounge opened his eyes. The word "stiff" seemed to have penetrated his fogged mind. His lips moved, and they bent forward to catch his weak words.

"Not, Stiff," he murmured. "Not any more. I poured it all out—all out."

"See—balmy!" asserted Mister Stone.

"What is your name?" asked the captain.

But the man's eyes had closed again, and he seemed not to hear the question.

"Exhaustion," said the captain. "Here—where is that steward with the drink and blankets? Here, steward!"

The steward arrived with the warmed blankets, and a steaming glass. They bundled the shivering body into the covering, and Stone lifted the slack shoulders, while the steward proffered the glass.

"Gone asleep or fainted," remarked Stone. "Have to pour it down."

He addressed the captain, and receiving no answer, looked up. He saw that the human icicle had entered the chart-house.

"How is he, captain," he heard the Great Kane say, in his cool, level voice. "I would like to see him. That was magnificent, you know, his leaping after his cat."

"Caved in—poor devil," said the captain. "Here he is, on the lounge. Just going to pour some whisky into him."

The great man leaned over the swaddled figure in Stone's arms. His face was impassive, as usual, but his weary eyes were alight with interest. "Like he was inspecting a dog," thought Stone, resentfully.

"Poor fellow," said Kane. "I shall do something for him. Braving death for his cat—magnificent! I must hear his story. I—I——"

The castaway stirred in Stone's arms, seemingly conscious of the sound of the millionaire's voice. He sat up a little, and the blanket which half-covered his face fell away. His eyes slowly opened, and he looked up into the face that bent over him.

"Hello, dad," he mumbled.

"—I—I—*My God—Bob!*" The words seemed wrenched from Kane's lips.

The astounded second mate beheld a wonderful and weird transformation—the iron immobility of Kane's countenance was gone, and the stern face was suddenly alive with surging feeling. The great man dropped to his knees beside the couch, pushed Stone away, and threw his arms around the blanketed figure. His voice, no longer cool and level, babbled brokenly:

"Bob—Bobby—Boy!"

The rescued man was struggling to keep awake, it was evident. Also, he seemed struggling to explain something to the old man who embraced him.

"I won, dad!" Stone heard him say. "I can come back. I poured it all out—to

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show him I was master, dad. I'm not a stiff, dad. Man, now. Poured it all out—like this."

He extended a trembling hand, and took the glass of hot whisky from the steward. But instead of lifting it to his lips, he spilled it deliberately.

"Like that—poured it all out—all out. Not a stiff—I'm a man." The heavy eyelids dropped again, and the body relaxed in Kane's arms.

"Balmy as a bat," mused Stone.

The eyes opened slowly again, and the mumbling voice proceeded. The fellow was evidently harking back to the captain's question. His mouth was twisted into a pathetic attempt at a smile.

"Name? Name not Stiff. I—I'm Bobby —B-Bobby Kane!"

The curious smile remained on his lips as he sank back in his father's arms, deep asleep.

SOLILOQUY OF A ZXA COWPUNCHER

by H. RONDTHALER

I BEEN readin' in magazines cow-punchin's had its time.
"Cowboys are figures of the past," these writin' men opine.
"They used to ride and swing the rope and bust the running steer,
But that's all gone—no more Wild West—another day is here."
Say! If you pen-pushin' dudes rode for the Z X A,
Had to step up on uh broncho at sunrise every day—
Step up on uh outlaw when you know he's goin' to buck,
So you grab him with the steel an' rake him jest fer luck.
Say! If you pen-pushin' dudes rode for the Z X A,
D'you reckon you'd still write—"The cowboy's gone away?"

If you had to quit the blankets a-shiverin' like uh hound
When the cook yells: "Come 'n get 'er or I'll throw 'er on the ground!"
Had to roll your bed an' scoff your chuck with fingers stiff an' blue,
An' the frost still on the sage-brush; the stars still twinklin' through,
Had to wrastle with uh cyuse, cinch up, an' ride away
While the mountain-tops are shinin' with the comin' of the day.
Had to ride your outside circle o' forty miles or so,
Lopein' through the sage-brush till the desert sun swings low,
Then, would you call us dead ones, say the cowboy's gone away,
If you rode out with us boys here on the Z X A?

If you rode out with us boys where the antelopes still skim
Across the flats an' up the draws around the desert's rim;
Out where the buckskin-colored buttes along the foothills lie—
Above, beyond, the snowy peaks stand out ag'in the sky—
Lopein' sunny hours away across th' table-land,
Standin' guard in the starry night over the saddle band;
Or maybe trainin' long horns, squeezin' broncs, or ropin' steers;
Then, would you say the cowboy's dead, belongs to by-gone years?
Would you still say the puncher's gone, if you was here today
A-ridin' out with us boys for the Z X A?

If you rode out with us boys in wind, snow, rain, or shine,
From dawn till dark, week in week out, a-ridin' all the time.
Some days —— nigh a-freezin', others hot as hell—
A-fightin' thirst an' weariness, an' alkali, an'—well,
I'll tell you pencil-pushers, I'll give it to you straight,
If you rode out with us boys, I 'low you'd change your gate.
You drop that stuff about "The times we'll never see again,
When punching cows was hardy work and wanted hardy men,"
You'd never say "The West is tame, the cowboy's gone away,"
If you rode with us boys here on the Z X A.

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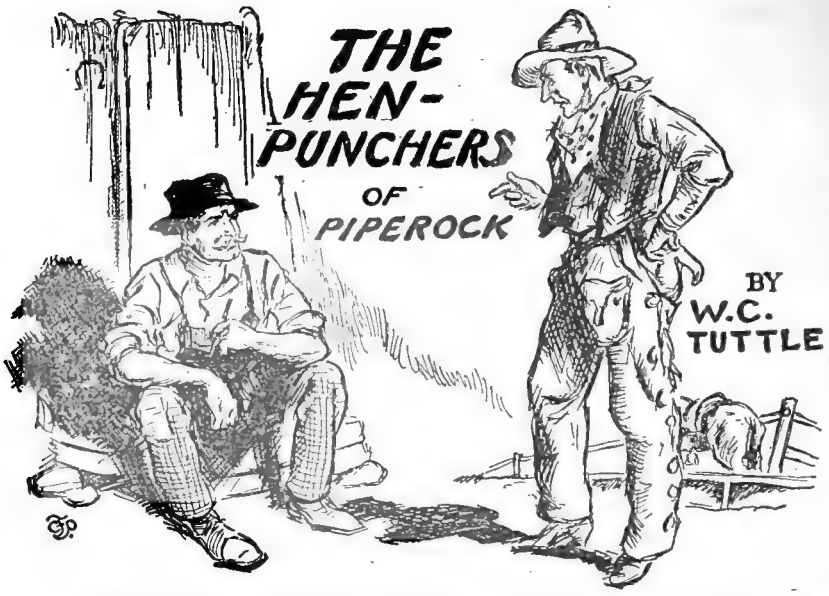

Author of "A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse," "Bearly Reasonable," etc.

DID yuh ever git so dog-goned good and hungry that yore mind gits to hangin' onto one single item uh grub, and yuh feels that yuh won't never be satisfied until yuh gits it?

Shore yuh have. Cowpunchers have that failin' uh heap, and the one item is usually ham and aigs. Shore, ham and aigs is one item uh grub same as liver and bacon or hawg and hominy. The full moon of uh aig yolk, shinin' on uh background uh juicy ham—Cripes! That's how me and Magpie Simpkins felt when we ties our broncs in front uh Jimmy Peyton's chop-house in Piperock, and wipes the alkali dust out uh our ears.

Two souls with but uh single thought—ham and aigs. When we gits inside we finds Slim Hawkins and Cobalt Williams, of the Seven A outfit, and they're settin' at uh table lookin' sad-like at Jimmy.

Jimmy stands there, with that long lock uh hair slidin' down off his head and interferin' with the sight of his right eye, and the other eye is squinted from the smoke of uh limp cigaret which hangs out uh the corner uh his big mouth.

"Not one, Jimmy?" asks Cobalt. "Not uh danged single one?"

Jimmy shakes his head, and wipes off uh table fer me and Magpie.

"Not one, Cobalt. The aig crop in Piperock is minus. The last one I has I boils fer Buck Masterson this mawnin'. There's the last sad re-mains over ag'in the door where Buck tries to assassinate me with it. Buck swears that it chirped when it busted. It wa'n't what you'd call uh brand-new aig."

"What do yuh know about that, Magpie?" askes Cobalt. "Me and Slim rides plumb over from Hell Gate Springs to git uh big feed, and finds that the ingredients is invisible. Shucks! Uh feed house without aigs ceases to deserve the title."

"Come to ponder on the subject," sez Magpie, drummin' on the table with his fork, "a aig shore does appeal to my stummick. Nothin' like uh nice aig yolk on uh piece uh juicy ham, but when yuh takes away the aig that ham ain't nothin' but jist plain hog."

"My opinion edzactly," agrees Slim. "I jist seems to pine fer uh aig like uh calf fer it's maw. I ain't got no ham hunger unless it's chaperoned by a aig."

"I'd hate to say what I'd give fer one," sighs Cobalt. "I reckon I'd give uh four-bit piece fer one right now—middlin' fresh one at that."

"Why don't some uh these nesters around here rustle uh herd uh she-chickens and raise aigs?" complains Slim. "They harbors uh lot uh dogy cows which don't

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produce milk, and they raises onions. Who the —— wants onions! Shucks! Give me uh can uh peaches and some coffee."

When Magpie Simpkins was born he inherited uh li'l kink, which has allus stood in his way when it comes to bein' uh normal human bein'. Sometimes he's normal but when anythin' happens to enervate that kink th' stuff is all off. When it gits to kinkin' yuh can tell it by jist one sign—song. I knowed when we walked out uh that restaurant that day that my peace and comfort was drawin' to uh sundown, 'cause when we forks our broncs and ambles off toward our shack, Magpie lifts his voice in song:

When the Springti-i-i-ime cometh, gentle Annie-e-e-e-e.

Jist that one line. I've often wondered what happened to gentle Annie when the Springtime cometh, but Magpie said he hadn't never heard. He jist wailed the one line, and he could hold uh high note on Annie until I often feels sorry fer the pore gal. I opines to myself that I ought to go to uh photygrafter and git my tin-type taken so I could show folks how I looked before. I don't ask no questions. When that kink is workin' he's about as sociable as uh pole-cat.

"Ike," sez he, th' next day, when we're settin' in front of our cabin, "I've got it all figgered out."

"I've got uh lot uh friends in Piperock," I states, "and all I asks, Magpie, is uh chance to pack my war-sack, and tell 'em all good-by. Yore experiments don't appeal to me a-tall, but I don't want to leave without uh word."

"Experiment? Who said this was uh experiment?" he snorts. "This here is uh dead immortal cinch, Ike. Go ahead and punch cows fer forty uh month if yuh wants to."

"They've all been cinches, Magpie," sez I. "I'm gittin' tired uh cinches, so I reckon I'll jist move along while the way is open. Mebby when I'm in the sere and yaller leaf I'll appreciate uh cinch and then I'll come back to you."

When it comes to tearful voices, that Magpie person can give 'em all uh quart handicap. I'm old enough to know better, and I've heard them woful accents often enough to git wise, but dog-gone, what could I do when he opines thusly:

"Ol'-timer, I'm full uh grief and sorrow. You and me been pardners fer years, sharin' our blankets and beans, and now yuh elects to leave me forever. You know what's best, Ike. Go if yuh must, but not in anger, 'cause I loves yuh like uh brother and I know that life is goin' to be empty when yo're gone. Won't yuh stay another week, Ike? Pardner uh mine, I needs yuh like uh porkypine needs quills."

"Well," sez I, wipin' the sweat off my cheek-bones, "lookin' at it from uh sentimental standpoint I'll go yuh oncet. What's the idea, Magpie?"

He points down across the hills and sez:

"Ike, do yuh see that li'l bunch uh cactus-covered hills down there? Them's mine now."

"Well," sez I, "they say that man wants li'l here below, but I reckon you undershoots that about six feet, Magpie. Cactus, mesquite and grasshoppers! Without wishin' to be considered inquisitive and nosey, I'd shore admire to know why you accumulates such undesirable real estate? Uh man couldn't raise whiskers on that plot."

"All I asks is perfect faith," sez he. "I aims to show yuh how to git rich without workin', Ike."

ME AND Magpie goes on with our li'l social duties, and things is normal fer uh week, except that Magpie wails uh heap about gentle Annie. One evenin' the stage comes in and she's piled up high with boxes. Andy Johnson is drivin' and he's some peevish. He climbs down and starts jerkin' the ropes off that load.

"Gol dang. This shore is some load!" snorts Andy. "Between them hawgs and he-hens I shore have had one hy-iu trip, if yuh asks me. First uh hawg would squeal and then uh he-hen—the same uh which ain't familiar to my broncs—would yell, and then I has uh man-sized runaway on my hands."

"I reckon that freight is fer me," states Magpie.

"Ke-rect!" snaps Andy. "Help me git this danged hawg crate off. Them's the funniest lookin' hawgs I ever seen. Cripes! They ain't wider'n nothin' and about five feet long."

"Razor-backs, Andy," sez Magpie, grinnin'. "Them hawgs is reported to contain the sweetest meat on—hol' onto that crate! Dog-gone!"

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Andy misjudges the weight of the crate as it slides off, and down she comes onto the ground with uh smash! The crate busts wide open and there stands them hawgs, tryin' to git their bearin's. Magpie takes one less look than the hawgs did, and dives fer the pair.

Magpie is shore some sudden mover, but he didn't figger on the speed uh them slender animiles, and all he gits is his hands full uh dirt, while the hawgs shoots right under the stage and under the feet uh them four broncs. Blooey!

Uh bronc is some tickled when he can find somethin' to git good and scared at, and all four uh them buzzard-heads seems to be delighted with the situation. They yanks the stage plumb off the ground, and heads right up the main street, with them crates ridin' high, wide, and handsome.

At the upper end of the street, in front uh Holt's hotel, is uh tree. It's the only one in five miles, and uh course them broncs has to head straight fer it. One uh the leaders stands on his rump on Holt's porch and then rolls into the doorway, to the consternation uh the Holt fambly. The other goes buckin' off across the flat with nothin' on except his blinders and uh throat-latch. The pole uh the wagon hits the tree dead center, and the wheelers splits and burns the sand away from Piperock and razor-backs. The wagon jack-knifes, and all three uh them crates rises sudden like, hits the tree and proceeds to open up all to oncet.

Chickens? Say, when them crates busted it looks like an explosion in uh feather-bed factory. We runs up there as fast as we can, and it looks like the whole town was comin' to the scene. When we gits there them chickens ain't noways in evidence—jist busted wagon, busted crates and feathers.

Andy walks around the stage and looks her over and then gazes up in the tree. We natcherally all looks up, and there on uh limb stands uh he-hen with uh scared look in his eyes. Jist one left out uh them three crates full.

We don't git more'n one good look before uh gun explodes in our midst and that chicken ain't nothin' but uh bunch uh soiled feathers.

"There!" sez Andy, shovin' his gun back in his belt. "That's how much I appreciates chickens."

"Folks," states Magpie, "I calls yuh all to witness my ultimatum. I hereby states that I won't pay Andy one cent fer haulin' that bunch uh livestock up here. With malice aforethought and uh .45 he's done assassinated freight which was assigned to his care. He's responsible fer safe delivery."

"Mebby I was uh bit hasty," sez Andy. "But so long as Magpie feels the way he does about it I'm sorry that hawgs can't climb trees. Uh hen ain't what I'd call adequate recompense fer uh busted stage, four busted harnesses and four locoed broncs."

"Mister Simpkins!" One uh Sam Holt's kids worms his way through the crowd and grabs Magpie by the leg. "The blacksmith's done killed one uh yore hawgs."

"Cripes!" howls Magpie, "I done paid fifteen apiece fer them animiles." And we all gallops off down to the blacksmith shop.

We finds Pete Gonyer settin' on the sill of the doorway, holdin' his head in his hands.

"Did you kill one uh my hawgs?" yells Magpie.

Pete looks up in uh dazed sort of uh way and rubs his stummick.

"I did not," sez he. "My gosh! I shore hit him hard enough, Magpie, to kill all the hawgs on earth. He went down, and when I starts to drag him out he tore loose, went between my legs and I busts my wish-bone on the anvil."

"What did yuh hit him fer in the first place?" asks Magpie.

"I was shoein' Art Miller's pinto hoss, and jist as I was fittin' uh shoe on uh hind foot that narrer contracted piece uh animated bacon comes in and says, 'Woosh!' at that hoss.

"He wooshed all right, and I had hold uh that hind leg. Jist after he wooshed I hits my head on the other side uh that shop and the pinto emigrates toward Canada. When I opens my eyes that danged hawg is blowin' bubbles in my slack-tub. That's when I soaks him, Magpie."

Magpie turns to the crowd and spies them three kids uh Sam Holt's and sez:

"Say, you kids, want to earn some money. If you'll ketch all them hens uh mine and bring 'em up to my cabin I'll give yuh ten cents fer each one. There's forty-eight—no, forty-seven. One was sacrificed to pay th' freight."

"Yore hawgs are over back uh my restaurant," states Jimmy Peyton. "I tries

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to take my garbage can away from 'em but I shore changed my mind. What in —— kind uh hawgs is them, Magpie. Look to me like uh cross between uh bed-slat and uh grizzly. I don't like 'em a-tall."

"Th' man what sold 'em to me told me that they was razor-backs and that they could hold their own anywhere," sez Magpie.

"Well," opines Jimmy, "I don't mind that so much, but I don't care to have 'em hold my own. I'd admire to git my can back."

I don't know yet jist how we manages to git them hawgs up to our cabin. They're the worst critters I ever tried to lead or drive, but we manages to git 'em home before dark and puts 'em into uh li'l corral which Magpie builds uh few days before. One uh Holt's kids comes up later and tells us that our hens will be brought up the next mawnin' 'cause they've all hived up in his father's barn.

"So this was yore cinch scheme, was it?" I sez, as I starts supper.

"Uh-huh," sez Magpie. "It wa'n't what you'd call a suspicious beginnin', Ike, but we shore advertised our new business. Whenever uh person gits to thinkin' of us they'll jist natcherally think about ham and aigs. Sabe? Now, forty-seven hens means forty-seven aigs per day. At four bits each that totals up to the sum of twenty-three dollars and four bits per day. Add that to uh few head uh hawgs per year and she looms up, Ike, she looms up."

"Shore," I agrees, "but she'd loom up uh heap bigger if yuh didn't have so many he-hens in that herd, and also if them two hawgs wa'n't of the gentlemen variety. She-hens are the ones what lays the aigs."

"It's reasonable to suppose that the man what sells 'em to me knows my needs, Ike. I can't say that he treated me edzactly right in the hawg proposition though. He shore did send me uh mixed lot uh stock. When that wagon hit the tree I sees blacks, browns, bays, sorrels, roans and pintos in great profusion. She shore is a assorted herd."

"What do yuh aim to feed 'em on?" I asks.

"That's where them cactus hills comes in, Ike. Fer some reason the grasshoppers seems to congregate on them hills. Uh course you'll find 'em other places, too, but right there is where the bulk of the Hopper fambly lives. In the mawnin' I'm goin' to haze 'em down there and play hen-puncher while they grazes. What's botherin' me now is how to brand 'em. I was plannin' to run uh S on the hip but it can't be done. Also yuh can't ear-brand or dewlap. Mebby I could paint 'em like they do on sheep."

"Why brand 'em a-tall?" I asks. "There ain't no other herd in the country."

Magpie ponders deep fer uh while and sez:

"Mebby that's right, Ike, but I shore hates to run uh herd without uh brand. I'll take that ol' Bar S iron and run it on them hawgs in the mawnin'."

But Magpie didn't run that iron on them hawgs, fer the simple reason that them hawgs wa'n't there in the mawnin'. That corral was built to hold uh hawg, not uh cross-cut saw on legs. Magpie immediate and soon goes out hawg huntin', and when he's gone Tellurium Woods shows up.

While me and Tellurium is plenty friendly, him and Magpie don't hitch a-tall. Tellurium is built like uh hooch barrel, and he ain't got no hair on his head, which makes him plumb laughable whenever he removes his hat.

I tells him about Magpie's scheme and he laughs so hard he busts the top button off his pants. He does that every time he laughs hearty, so he packs uh li'l box uh them patent buttons along with him. When somethin' funny is liable to happen he carries the box in his hand.

He don't laugh so much when I explains that Magpie's goin' to corral the aig market and shove that article up to four bits each.

"Two bits is enough," he argues. "After yuh gits over thirty-five cents fer a aig yo're infringin' on uh citizen's rights. It ain't noways accordin' to humanity to charge uh feller four bits fer one li'l aig, Ike."

"But these will be fresh aigs," I states.

"Shucks! That ain't nothin'. The inhabitants uh Piperock wouldn't appreciate fresh aigs, 'cause why they ain't got no taste like one what has sort o' lingered. I shore likes to taste what I'm eatin'."

ME AND Tellurium sa'nters down to Buck Masterson's saloon after a while, and jist gits inside in time to hear Magpie state:

"I don't care if yuh didn't know what it was, Cobalt. Jist 'cause yuh don't know

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what uh thing is ain't no reason fer takin' uh shot at it."

"Well," sez Cobalt, leanin' ag'in' the bar, and rollin' uh smoke. "As I stated before, Magpie, I ain't noways to blame. I've imbibed the full of uh mule's ear uh Buck's hooch to see if she won't help my appetite. While I'm engagin' uh full meal in deadly combat down in Jimmy's place I happens to turn around and here comes that thing. I sez to myself: 'Cobalt, that hooch gave yuh somethin' beside uh appetite.' And I starts shootin'."

"Aw ——!" sez Buck, slidin' the bottle down the bar. "Let's all have uh li'l snifter. What's the use uh arguin'? That hawg never got hit."

"It ain't the fact of the hawg gittin' away with uh whole hide," orates Magpie, "but it's the principle of the thing. Jist because it looks uh heap like uh delirium tremens apparition don't lessen the fact that it's uh hawg, and stands me fifteen dollars each. I'm now goin' to try and put them things back into the corral before some hooch-soaked hombre makes the mistake, uh shootin' my thirty dollars into ribbons. Come and help me, Ike."

"Can't be done," sez I. "I got uh li'l deal to talk over with Tellurium."

"Then you let him do the talkin', Ike. Keep yore mouth shut or he'll steal the fillin' out uh yore gold tooth."

That shows how much affection Magpie's got for Tellurium Woods. When I goes home Magpie has the hens all safe and sound but the hawgs is still at large.

We shore has uh hy-iu time fer the next week. Me and Magpie punches hens—the same uh which can't be done. Them danged things is shore finicky and weak-minded in the head. They're plenty willin' to go out to feed but jist as soon as they gits their stummicks full uh hoppers—blooey! They admires to see what's over in the next county.

Them hawgs never gits corral broke and spends most uh their spare time rootin' up the creek bottom and huntin' fer trouble. We ain't worried when they don't come home at night 'cause nothin' less than uh full-grown grizzly'd tackle that pair. In uh week we gits two aigs, which is deposited in the hen shack. One uh them ain't noways firm and Magpie wipes the re-mains off his vest. The other is up to plans and specifications and Magpie markets it for four bits to Jimmy, and spends the proceeds fer stickin'-plaster fer our heel blisters.

We're settin' in our cabin one evenin' about ten days after our herd arrives, when Art Miller comes in.

"I reckon this range is goin' to be given over to the aig industry right soon," states Art.

"Meanin' which?" I asks.

"Well, Andy Johnson hauls another load uh aig-producers tonight. Four boxes of 'em fer Tellurium Woods. Bein' as Pete Gonyer helps him take 'em away, I'd opine that they're in pardnership."

"We ain't heard no funereal marches played in Piperock fer quite some spell, but I kin hear, 'Ashes to ashes' right now," sez Magpie. "Dog-gone, uh feller can't start nothin' without uh lot uh imitators startin' up. Them fellers ain't pioneers in the aig business like me and Ike and they shore are breedin' trouble, Art."

We argues the question fer uh while, and Art leaves. As soon as he's gone, Magpie puts on his coat and tells me to come on. We pilgrims down to Jimmy's place and he's alone.

"Jimmy," sez Magpie, "I wants to contract to furnish yuh with aigs. About how many can yuh use per day?"

Jimmy scratches his head and grins:

"Magpie, I needs at least uh dozen uh day but I've done contracted with Tellurium Woods. He's agreed to let me have uh dozen uh day at two bits each."

"It can't be done!" howls Magpie. "Dad bust it, Jimmy, it can't be done! Two bits! Why, uh feller couldn't make nothin' at that price. Uh hen ain't like uh cow, Jimmy. Yuh got to spend all yore time on the job."

"I ain't got nothin' to say," replies Jimmy. "Bein' the consumer, I ain't mixin' a-tall. All I asks is aigs."

Magpie is so mad he don't talk to me that night. In the' mawnin' he lets the chickens out and hazes 'em down to the hills. I ambles down after awhile, and I sees Magpie settin' on uh rock, and he's countin' out loud:

"Thirty-nine, forty, forty-one, forty-two —gol dung yuh, hold still uh minute can't yuh—forty-three—Ike, where in —— does th' increase come from? I've counted 'em up to sixty and there don't seem to be no ——"

"Hey! What yuh doin' with my hens?"

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yells uh voice behind us, and here comes Tellurium Woods down the hill, with uh shotgun under his arm. "What do yuh mean by mixin' herds with me, eh? Yo're uh nice——"

Magpie jumps to his feet and starts toward Tellurium.

"Git off my hen range!" he whoops. "Git yore bunch uh animated dusters off these hills!"

Tellurium spits in the dust and waves his shotgun.

"What yuh talkin' about, yuh long, disjointed hawg-herder?"

"E-nough!" snaps Magpie. "This is my range and I don't allow no trespassin'. Sabe? Take yore herd and vamoose."

'Ain't this uh-free range?" asks Tellurium, sarcastic like.

"Not any she ain't. I've done located this prickly pear plot as uh homestead. All this mesquite, sage-brush, rocks, scorpions, tarantalers and rattlers belongs to me. Also if yuh don't git yore hen herd off right now I'm goin' to sue yuh fer about one acre uh grasshoppers. Yore herd are shore some ravenous."

Tellurium, bein' plumb respectful uh personal rights, starts in to cut out his hens. It's some job, bein' as his herd is also mixed on color.

Cuttin' out uh hen is some chore. Jist about the time yuh thinks yuh got her cut out she sneaks under uh mesquite. Yuh gits down on yore prayer bones to chase her out, and yuh finds that she's gone out the other side uh long time ago and is now helpin' some more hens hold uh convention under another bush.

Tellurium is some busy, and Magpie is right on his trail to see that he don't make no mistakes.

Tellurium cuts out uh pair uh hens and hazes 'em up the hill uh ways.

"Hold on there!" yells Magpie. "Don't yuh cut out them two roans. I know them two shore is members uh my herd. No, you don't take that li'l bay one, either. I reckon I knows my own stock."

Tellurium glares at Magpie and starts after another hen. I reckon that hen was plumb kerflumixed, 'cause she dodges the wrong way and Tellurium steps square on her. That hen's usefulness is over.

"Yuh, will, will yuh!" yells Magpie, grabbin' Tellurium by the back uh the neck. "You done killed that hen uh purpose, knowin' she was uh favorite uh mine. You danged ol' buffalo-whiskered hippopotamus, you and me's goin' to mix!"

They shore did! Tellurium drops his gun when Magpie grabs him, and I appropriates said hardware and appoints myself referee. Hoyle didn't have uh word to say about that fight. Tellurium ain't built fer speed, but he shore has uh swing that's wide and graceful. Magpie is so tall that when he bends over his waist line is five feet back from the point of his jaw.

They wrecks two uh Magpie's perfectly healthy mesquites, and up-roots uh half-acre uh thrivin' cactus, the same uh which is decoratin' Tellurium's carcass, makin' him look uh heap like uh porkypine.

After the usual small parlor talk, Magpie sets his toes and dives fer Tellurium's belt line. I rolls 'em apart. There ain't no use countin' 'cause they're both out. I reckon Magpie's done twisted his neck, and Tellurium looks jerky around the waist line, like uh balloon with uh leak.

Pretty soon Magpie is with us ag'in, and he looks over at Tellurium, who is laborin' some hard. Magpie twists his neck some careful and grins.

"I knowed I'd knock him out, Ike," sez he. "But I don't jist remember what it was all about."

"Hens," sez I, and jist about that time Tellurium heaves uh big sigh and sets up.

"Hens is right," sez he. "Jist as soon as I gits my wind ——"

"Yo're goin' to git off my property," finishes Magpie.

TELLURIUM pulls most uh the prominent cactus out of his hide, and goes hen huntin' ag'in.

"Look here!" snaps Magpie. "Do you know yore own herd, Tellurium?"

"Beyond contradiction," sez Tellurium. "Why?"

"I'm jist wonderin'. If you do I don't see why yo're herdin' that li'l bay hen. That particular one I'm callin' Louise, and me and her is tillicums. Sabe? I'm ashamed to know uh hen-puncher what don't know his own herd."

Tellirium wipes the sweat off his bald head and glares at Magpie.

"——!" sez he. "How do yuh reckon I'm ever goin' to git my hens cut out if each time yuh claims the critter? It ain't

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reasonable, Magpie. What I suggests is this: I'll take my required number regardless. They're all hens anyway."

"You git any aigs yet?" asks Magpie.

"Not a aig."

"Then yore idea don't appeal to me a-tall. I got two already and I ain't goin' to take uh chance on you gittin' my prize layers. Somewhere in that herd is uh hen what don't put good covers on her produce, but I reckon she's young yet and will do better with practise. One other is uh humdinger of uh layer, but I don't recognize her, and I can't take no chances. Sabe?"

"Mebby my herd will come home at night," states Tellurium, hopeful like. "It's reasonable to suppose that they knows their own home corral."

"Uh-huh," agrees Magpie. "But in the meantime they're eatin' up my range. By night my total loss in grasshoppers will amount to jist about twenty dollars, and I'm here to orate that unless I'm reimbursed to that amount I-mavericks enough hens to square the bill."

"Twenty dollars——!" howls Tellurium. "Why, Magpie, it——"

"Dollars or hens," states Magpie. "I ain't in the feed business fer my health, and pasture means money. Sabe?"

Tellurium is gittin' pretty sore about this time and he's also tired.

"Dollars or hens, eh? How many hens do yuh reckon it will take to square the bill, Magpie?"

Magpie figgers on his fingers and looks the herd over.

"I reckon it will take about forty——"

"Forty," explodes Tellurium. "Why, gol dang it, Magpie I only got forty-eight!"

"Eight," finishes Magpie. "Don't ask uh question, Tellurium, and then git all heated up and butt in before it's answered." Tellurium digs down in his pocket and hauls out uh ol' tobacco sack.

"Here's yore danged twenty!" he snaps, handin' the bill to Magpie. "I'm goin' home, Magpie, and I hopes fer yore sake that my four dozen hen animiles comes home to bed down. Otherwise I appeals to the law."

Tellurium pilgrims off toward town, wipin' the sweat off his bald dome, and slappin' his leg with his hat. I reckon he's some exasperated.

"That's finance, Ike," grins Magpie. "This ham and aig business shore is uh winner, jist like I said. I'll keep that twenty fer uh rainy day."

We has uh audience at our cabin when we arrives with the herds that evenin'. Tellurium Woods, Pete Gonyer, Andy Johnson, Judge Steele and Sam Holt is settin' in front of our cabin, and they seems uh heap interested in our hens. They watches us haze 'em into the hen shack, and then Judge Steele removes his hat and opines:

"It has been brought to my notice that things ain't edzactly right up here. Mister Woods comes to me with the complaint that he's been unfairly gouged in uh legitimate enterprise, and wishes uh satisfactory settlement. I understands that there has been uh minglin' uh livestock which has caused Mister Woods deep grief and sorrow, not to mention financial losses."

"Is Pete Gonyer full uh sorrow, too?" asks Magpie.

"He shares both mentally and financially," states the judge.

"Also I harbors ill-feelin' toward them hawgs," sez Pete.

"Art Miller deciphers that I'm to blame fer the loss uh that pinto hoss. Now, that hawg——"

"I'm ag'in all local productions uh ham and aigs," cuts in Andy Johnson. "The last I hears uh my four-hoss team they're standin' on uh bluff in the Medicine Hills, afraid to eat."

"Well," sez Magpie, complainin' like, "that's always the way with folks when uh feller tries uh new scheme. Nobody helps but they all tries to hinder. Me and Ike figgers that we're uh boon to humanity when we introduces domestic ham and aigs, but I finds that our efforts in behalf uh the betterment uh local conditions ain't appreciated. Genius ain't appreciated noway. Christopher Columbus was in the same fix when he said——"

"Christopher Columbus never got his hens mixed!" howls Tellurium. "Why talk about the Civil War, Magpie—git up to date."

"That's jist what I tries to do, Tellurium, and look what I gits fer it. You and Pete covets my business, and jist because yo're uh failure at it yuh has to invite the law to help yuh out. What do yuh aim to do about it?"

"We'll hold them hens in abeyance," sez the judge, "until official adjudication."

"Never heard uh the place, Judge," states

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Magpie. "Bein' uh heap interested in the ultimate disposition uh them hens I'd argue that we leaves 'em in that shack."

"The law has been invoked and must be obeyed," pronounces the judge. "Them hens is disturbin' the peace and tranquillity uh this here law-abidin' community, and so far they ain't been no benefit a-tall. While they ain't edzactly what you'd call uh public nuisance——"

"I'd say that them hawgs comes under that description, Judge," interrupts Andy.

"There wa'n't no hawgs mentioned in this complaint," sez the judge. "Until them hawgs do become obnoxious, Andy——"

"Zowie."

Around the corner uh the cabin comes them two hawgs, runnin' about neck and neck and runnin' wild. They got plenty room to pass, but they acts uh heap like uh pair uh runaway cars—they can't seem to leave the track.

Tellurium is uh heap bowed in the legs, and them hawgs is taperin' as to form, but there ain't room fer both of 'em to go through the wicket to oncet. They makes uh good try, though. Tellurium's right toe ketches the judge under the chin, and they're both still in the air when them hawgs vanishes over the hill. Tellurium sets up and rubs his bald head. It's all right. I don't know why he rubs his head, 'cause he didn't 'light thataway. He glares at Magpie fer uh minute and then pulls uh six-shooter out uh the band uh his pants.

"Now, dog-gone yuh, Magpie," sez he, "I'm shore goin' to make yore string-bean carcass look like uh worm-eaten lodgepole! Sic yore hawgs on me, will yuh!"

"Aw ——!" snorts the judge, reachin' over and smotherin' Tellurium's weapon, with one hand, while he rubs his own jaw with the other. "Lost me uh tooth—eye-tooth!" he announces. "Put down that gun, you clumsy hippopotamus! I'm the one to feel insulted. I reckon them hawgs ain't been misrepresented a-tall. Such goin's-on makes me sore in spirit and meek feelin'."

"Sore spirits must be all the rage this season, Judge," states Magpie. "I'm wearin' uh wreath of 'em myself. Tellurium, if you don't put down that gun I'm shore goin' to make yuh wish it was uh edible article. As far as them hawgs is concerned——"

"Where'd they go, eh? Where's them crosses between uh grizzly bear, cross-cut saw and uh hawg?"

There stands Jimmy Peyton, bareheaded and packin' uh 45-70. That long lock uh hair is still botherin' his sight, and the cigaret is no more than uh scrap uh brown paper hangin' to the corner of his mouth. He's pantin' like uh overheated pup.

"Where'd they go to?" he yells, when nobody seems inclined to answer.

"Them hawgs, Jimmy, is under the jurisdiction of the court," states the judge.

"——!" snorts Jimmy. "Them animiles shore are there when it comes to gittin' under things. Them things admires to move my supply shack. They're as strong as mules, danged if they ain't!"

"That ain't no legitimate reason fer assaultin' 'em with uh 45-70," sez Magpie, peevish like. "Dumb animiles ain't to blame 'cause yore domicile ain't anchored solid."

"No, that's right," agrees Jimmy. "But gol blast it, Magpie, they gits on my nerves. I been oilin' my saddle in the kitchen, and I goes over to Buck's to git uh bracer. When I comes back them hawgs uh —— has et up most uh that saddle except the stirrups and the tree. When they sees me they wallers under that li'l shack, and by the time I borrows Buck's rifle and gits me another drink, that li'l shack is goin' down the street without visible means uh support. Dirty Shirt Jones comes ridin' straight fer Buck's place, but when he sees that shack he don't stop. He jist rides on up the street and don't even look at me. I reckon that was uh temperance lecture fer Dirty."

"This conversation is driftin' away from the main stem," states Tellurium. "We starts on uh hen mixture and leads up to uh booze cure. The fact that Dirty Shirt is laborin' under uh delusion don't adjudicate them hens.

"Me and Pete, bein' in the aig business, don't wish to tie up our capital while disinterested parties argues the wrongdoin's uh hawgs. Jist suppose that them hens lays uh lot uh aigs in that shack, Judge. Who owns the aigs, eh? Suppose we locks them hens up in that shack—who gits the custody uh the keys?"

"I'd argue that nobody does," states Pete. "Leave the door open. Suppose our hens wants to come home? What about that, eh? Them pore innocent hens uh mine and Tellurium's ain't to blame fer this

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trouble, and ought to be allowed to come home if they so wishes. Am I right?"

"That's uh reasonable thought, Pete," nods the judge. "Mebby the thing can be settled thataway. I don't reckon that nobody wants the responsibility uh actin' jailer fer hens, and I'm danged shore the law don't. I don't know nothin' about hens. Tellurium, are you willin' to call off further law proceedin's if this here scheme works out?"

"It costs me twenty, Judge, but I'm willin'. There's allus uh silver linin'—he might have put the price uh hoppers at forty dollars per acre. Leave the gates ajar, and may the best man win."

WE PROPS the door open, and the satisfied aggregation ambles off down town. They ain't gone long until Dirty Shirt rides up to our door. He slides off, sort uh painful like, and comes over and sets down. He don't say uh word.

"Nice day," sez Magpie.

Dirty stares at the ground fer uh minute or two and then sez, in mournful tones:

"Magpie, there ain't never going to be no more nice days fer me and mine. I been uh ungodly ol' pelican in my time, but now in the sere and yaller leaf my past life rises up like uh spook and mocks me. I've drunk enough hooch to fill Sullivan gulch, and she's reactin', Magpie, she's reactin'."

"Be uh good cheer, Dirty," consoles Magpie. "There ain't nothin' ever happened what was as bad as yuh looked fer. What seems to be bearin' down on yore immortal soul?"

Dirty heaves uh long slender sigh and shakes his head.

"I don't know, Magpie. I had snakes oncet over in Oklahoma, which I annexes from imbibin' boot-leg hooch, and I figgered that I've seen all there is to see, but by the muddy Missouri River, I don't believe I've begun' to ——!"

Dirty comes to his feet like uh flash and his face turns the color uh wet alkali mud. He goes after his six-gun, and wails hopeless like:

"It ain't no use in shootin' but I jist can't seem to know it!" And he starts shootin'.

It's them hawgs ag'in. They're jist comin' around the corner uh the hen shack when Dirty unlimbers with his .44, and they jist natcherally turns on the space of uh dime and splits the atmosphere around the other way.

"Flup! Bang! Zing-g-g-! Bing!"

I falls backward into the open door, Magpie ducks flat on the ground and crawls on his belly around the corner, and Dirty splits the breeze toward town behind his bronc, which seems to have contracted the getaway fever, too.

I hears two more shots fired, but the bullets don't come our way like the first two did. I pokes my head out and sees Magpie's nose stickin' around the corner of the cabin.

"Cripes!" sez he. "Must be uh Injun uprisin'. Better pass me my rifle out uh the window, Ike. Look! Dirty's caught his bronc and is reinforcin' our rear."

I cranes my neck, and sees Dirty. He's got the cabin between himself and where the bullets come from, and he's riding our way with his gun in his hand. He comes up behind the cabin and slides off.

"Some son-of-uh-gun danged near spoiled me!" he wails. "That chunk uh lead sung, 'There's uh land that is fairer than this,' right past my jug'lar vein, and I ain't swallered since."

He fidgits with his gun fer uh spell, and when we don't say nothin' he shoves the gun back into his holster and turns to Magpie:

"Magpie, did somebody shoot at me?" he asks, sort uh foolish like.

"I—I—I know I ain't edzactly myself but—it—huh—shore did seem—well, mebby I did imagine it but——"

"Yeow! I shore put the deadwood on 'em that time!" yells uh voice, and here comes Jimmy Peyton on uh bronc. He's got uh rope on the horn of his saddle, and is draggin' somethin' in the dust. His bronc don't seem pleased a-tall and is actin' scandalous. Jimmy's lost his hat but he's still hangin' onto the stub uh that cigaret.

"I got 'em!" he whoops ag'in, anglin' his bronc up to us. He shore had! On the end uh that rope is tied two hawgs—dead hawgs, too. Dirty Shirt walks out, sort o' unsteady like, and looks 'em over. He goes up and puts his hand on Jimmy's leg, and looks sad-like at him.

"Jimmy," sez he, "don't joke with uh pore ol' man. Is there anythin' draggin' in the loop uh yore rope?"

"Hawgs," sez Jimmy. "Dead hawgs, Dirty."

"Cripes!" sez Dirty, startin' fer his bronc

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and shakin' his head, "I thought all the time it was my mind, and now I finds that it's only my eyes. Gosh, I'm dry!"

"Yore first two shots didn't hit them hawgs," I states to Jimmy, reprovin' like.

"Impossible, Ike," sez he, rollin' uh fresh smoke. "My bronc tries to turn over backwards when them hawgs comes toward him, and my first two shots hits the sky. This bronc ain't what you'd call 'hawg broke.' "

"Mebby the sky was yore limit but you aimed too low," states Magpie. "Them two shots danged near makes uh vacancy in our law-abiding' community, as the judge would say."

"Close don't count in nothin' but pitchin' horse-shoes, so there ain't no use in holdin' post-mortems on might-have-beens. Loosen yore hawgs, and I'll go back, Magpie."

"Yore target practise this evenin', Mister Peyton, is goin' to cost yuh about thirty dollars," states Magpie. "Any time I wishes to butcher my hawgs I'll hire uh meat cutter, not uh cook."

"Thirty——!" wails Jimmy, slidin' off his bronc and illustratin' his peeve by wavin' his arms like uh windmill. "Why, gol ding it, Magpie, I'm uh public benefactor! You can't make me pay thirty dollars fer riddin' the world uh them things which is hawgs in name only. It ain't reasonable."

"Hawgs is hawgs," pronounces Magpie. "They sets me back jist what I tells yuh the damage amounts to. You goes after 'em like they was wild animiles. Them's domestic things, Jimmy."

Jimmy rolls uh smoke, sort uh thoughtful like, and looks at them two dead hawgs. He takes uh puff or two and throws the cigaret away.

"Huh!" he snorts. "I never thought about it thataway, Magpie. Will you and Ike take it out in trade?"

Would we? Well, I reckon that thirty dollars' worth uh feed looks good to me and Magpie, and we sez so to Jimmy, who goes off down-town, towin' them hawgs through the dust.

AFTER supper we goes down to Buck's place, and finds Dirty Shirt lit up like uh birthday cake fer the heap.

"Ike," sez he. "My ol' friend, Ike, my eyesight's glimmerin' out, but it ain't no worse'n lots uh others. They all sez that them things is hawgs, Ike. Gosh A'mighty, what imaginashuns some folks has. Le's all have li'l drink to shelebrate optical ill-illule's all——"

Dirty fergits the hawgs and goes to sleep under the pool table, and me and Magpie horns into uh game uh draw. It shore is some game. I manages to own what clothes I got on my back when I quits in the mornin', but that's about all.

Magpie yawns when I quits, and throws another twenty on the table.

"I been savin' this fer uh rainy day," he states, as Buck slips him another stack. "But I reckon I might as well use it, bein' as I got my feet plumb wet in this li'l pastime."

Tellurium seems uh heap interested in them chips. He recognizes the twenty as the grasshopper payment.

"The next deal Magpie picks up two li'l pairs and fills on the draw. Tellurium opines to need three, and he's the only one to see Magpie's bet, and he puts uh li'l raise under it. Magpie shoves the rest of the chips to the center, and spreads his hand.

"No more good than axle-grease on uh six-gun," grins Tellurium, spreadin' four queens. "Four hens, Magpie, takes the feed bill."

"That shore was hopper money, Ike," sez Magpie, yawnin. "She hops away from me some sudden. Let's go over and eat some uh the breakfasts we got comin' from Jimmy. It's uh lucky thing it was him what kills them hawgs. Suppose some uh these cow rustlers had uh done it."

Jimmy's locked up yet, in spite uh the fact that it's not very early, so Magpie sez:

"Let's go home and kill uh hen fer breakfast, Ike. Dog-gone, them things ought to be good fer somethin'. Might as well eat some now, Ike, 'cause by the time we gits through lawin' about 'em they're goin' to be so danged ol' and crippled up that they won't be edible a-tall."

When we gits to the cabin we sees Pete Gonyer settin' on uh stump near the hen shack, with his hat pulled down low over his face.

"Gosh A'mighty!" snorts Magpie. "I'll bet that hombre's been settin' here all night watchin' them hens. He shore must be uh heap wrapped up in the business."

"How's the hens, Pete?" I asks.

He's whistlin' "The Holy City" in uh low key, sort uh sad-like, and don't re-spond. He jist crooks his thumb over his shoulder

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toward the open door uh the hen shack, and goes on whistlin'. Magpie walks over, looks in, and then motions fer me. My gosh! It shore resembles uh riot in uh hen-hair factory. We examines it some close, and then Magpie shuts the door and turns to Pete.

"Well, Pete," sez he, "I'd opine that coyotes is uh unforeseen contingency."

"Indubitably," nods Pete. "That open-door policy shore settled the aig controversy." And then he switches his whistle to the "Cowboy's Lament."

Me and Magpie ambles down-town in silence, and finds Jimmy's place open. We sets down and pounds on the table, and Jimmy comes out with that lock uh hair ticklin' his nose, and the cigaret in the corner uh his mouth.

"Jimmy," sez Magpie, "bring me and Ike about—uh—good breakfast uh ham and aigs."

Jimmy grins and goes back to cook the order. He slips us two aigs and uh piece uh ham each. Magpie sniffs the aigs and turns up his long nose.

"Not any too recent, Jimmy," sez he.

"Nope," agrees Jimmy, leanin' ag'in' uh table and rollin' uh fresh smoke. "But at the present high price uh ham and aigs, unless yo're uh millionaire yuh can't expect fresh aigs."

"Meanin' which?" asks Magpie.

Jimmy lights his smoke and points over at the wall. There's uh sign on the wall which reads:

HAM AND EGGS——$20 PER ORDER

IF YOU FURNISH YOUR OWN HAM ——$15 PER ORDER

"Yo're the first ones to furnish yore own ham," grins Jimmy. "Uh course yuh didn't edzactly furnish 'em, but I'll give yuh the benefit uh the doubt."

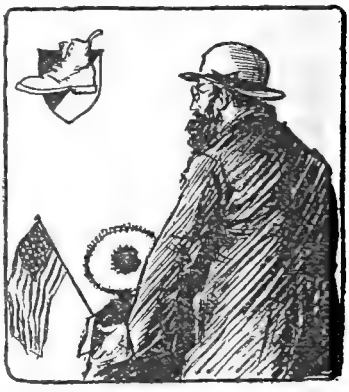
Magpie gazes at his plate fer uh minute and then back at the sign on the wall.

"That sign don't specify whether yuh furnishes coffee with yore meal or not, Jimmy."

"Coffee is free as per usual, Magpie."

"At them prices," sez Magpie, "any small favor is thankfully received."

The BREITSTEIN BRAND



By C. HILTON-TURVEY

Author of "Not in the Movies," "Spangles and Soap Suds," etc.

BREITSTEIN stuck his head out of the office window, and inclined an attentive ear.

"Uxtry! Uxtry! The United States declares war!"

War after all, eh?

Breitstein's eye wandered contemplatively after the "Uxtry" boy, encountering on the way the familiar figure of Jacob Chowsky waddling along like a balloon with feet.

As Breitstein watched, Chowsky tacked and bobbed into Breitstein's own doorway just below, that led to his shoe-findings factory on the second floor.

Breitstein withdrew his head and slammed the window down.

He scurried to his desk and began writing fiercely on a paper something of no particular importance.

He heard Chowsky's feet smiting the stairs in heavy ascent.

Another moment and Chowsky's yellow beak appeared in the opening door.

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"Hey, Breitstein!" he began wheezily.

Breitstein relinquished his labors with an air of obvious regret.

"Hello, Mr. Chowsky," he responded without undue enthusiasm.

"It's to be war a'ready," the visitor panted. He let himself down cautiously into a chair and surveyed Breitstein, his thick lip thrust out portentously.

"Sure," the other agreed, pushing his papers into a drawer, "but it means nothings to us. We ain't goin' for soldiers."

"*Aber*," Chowsky averred, "the U-nited States needs more things as soldiers yet. It needs shoes."

"Sure it needs shoes," Breitstein agreed. "But the big dealers will see to it. Nix for us."

Chowsky hitched his chair nearer.

"Listen!" he commanded. "I got a chanst. The big dealers is caught sudden. They got to make good in a hurry. Their stocks iss all gone a'ready mit the English und Cherman war. It must be they should come to the small dealers, ain't it?"

Breitstein nodded thoughtfully.

"I haf a cousin," Chowsky went on, "which has let me into a contract for shoe-findings. But my place iss too small already. I can do half, but no more yet. I'll let you in for the other half, Breitstein, if you come reasonable."

He made known to Breitstein the requirements of the order.

During the moment's silence that followed, Breitstein and Chowsky stared at each other as if trying to fathom each other's thoughts.

"I'm handin' you a chanst," Chowsky declared. "I always was a good friend to you."

He put his fat hands on his knees and wagged his head, trying to coerce his features into a philanthropic smile.

Breitstein considered, his head on the side—like a wary bird eying an unfamiliar insect. His mouth opened to a denial of Chowsky's last statement, then closed with a snap on the unspoken words.

"What's the lowest bid?" he asked, after a few more questions.

"Goldberg—six thousand," Chowsky replied, his beady black eyes out of their fatty cushions anxiously observant of the other.

"*Gottinhimmel!*" Breitstein groaned, pronouncing it as one continuous and desperate word. "Only six thousand!"

"*Aber—*" Chowsky began.

Breitstein waved his hands convulsively, warding off Chowsky's monstrous proposition.

"Six thousand! He should hand it to you for nothings at all! He must be crazy."

"*Aber—*" Chowsky went on urgently, "wot iss shoe-findings?—Paper—paper—and glue!"

He stuck his lip out scornfully and struck an attitude there in his chair.

Breitstein's arms sank slowly to his lap. He still shook his head in continuous negation. But his eyes behind their grubby spectacles were gleaming with the joy of battle.

"Six thousand!" he repeated mournfully, and spat expressively on the dingy floor.

They parleyed awhile, with gestures—on Breitstein's part—of extreme repugnance—of indignant refusal—of patient resignation; with exclamations of angry denial—of loud objection—of grieved and sodden acceptance.

For any one else, no—a thousand times no! But for a friend like Chowsky—Breitstein sighed prodigiously.

They got together on the details. Their heads bobbed close over the desk. Already Breitstein had shorn the quality of his shoe-findings down to the lowest terms, it seemed; reaping the highest profit out of almost worthless offerings. But, pushed to the wall by Goldberg's low bid, he made a supreme effort. The deal would go through in a hurry. So long as the samples passed muster—

It was a chance that would never come again. Breitstein's cheeks burned. Little red veins appeared in the white of his eyes. His collar felt tight.

But he kept his air of mournful acquiescence up to the last—as did Chowsky his genial air of patronizing a friend against his own personal interests.

But when the door closed between them, Breitstein listened attentively to Chowsky's flat-footed descent, then sprang up and walked about the little office, rubbing his long, dry palms together in happy excitement.

As for Chowsky, paddling out-toed down the dark stairway, he permitted himself one joyous stretch of the lips before he emerged into the light of the streets.

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Breitstein stayed late at the office, whittling the deal down to its smallest detail. He could see the dollars rolling toward him—clinking down into his pocket like pool-balls after a lucky stroke. And what it meant to him! It meant a real diamond ring for him—it meant that diamond brooch in Flattenberg's pawn-shop window for Bertha, his wife.

True, the stone was yellow—but it was a good stone and large. And Bertha would never know the difference anyway. As for Ikey, the only child now at home, it meant all sorts of things. Breitstein murmured an affectionate word at the thought of the boy.

He reached for his overcoat and hat, slammed his desk shut, pulled the chain of the gas-jet, and pulled the door to after him. Behind, in the factory that occupied the second floor of the building, the hum had long ceased. The night-watchman glowered at him from a doorway. He pattered down the dingy stairs to the street.

He was aware at once of an unwonted stir. The streets were crowded. Everybody was out—walking up and down as if it were a holiday.

This war, which had pended long, had never till now attracted the ordinary citizens. They had thought it a matter for the rich man, the greedy capitalist, the jingo, the class who would not let well-enough be. Now, in one blazing instant, it had become a matter for every American from least to greatest. No question now of the capitalist class. This was the people's war, and the people would carry it on to a finish.

IN FRONT of the newspaper office the crowd was jammed solid. An eddy of hurrying men bore Breitstein into the mix and held him there.

A speaker was haranguing the crowd. He was so hot with his subject that he jerked off his collar and tie and rammed them into his pocket.

"We're in this war to win!" he shouted. "But it's going to be a long job, and every man, woman and child must do his part. We can't all march with the soldiers. But, by God, we can back them up to the limit here at home! How? '

"Maybe I can't tell you. But that woman with her market-basket can buy cheaper food and less of it—that man can smoke less, spend less, work more. That child can help too, in his own small way. But each one of you will know when his chance comes. And if you take that chance and work your living soul into it, you can call yourself an American. But if you eat your bread under the folds of the Stars and Stripes and don't do your best to defend its interests even against your own—you have betrayed it—and you're an alien, whether you've been here ten years or a hundred!"

His voice lashed the crowd like a whip of thongs. "If you let somebody else fight for the flag and do not do your own share, you might as well spit on it and be done with it!"

A ring of applause followed his passionate words.

Breitstein elbowed himself to a loose place in the crowd and went home. He was not intensely interested in politics. He thought of the subject in terms of the ward and the boss. It was not—he told himself—a game for Jews. They were liable to get stung. It was only the Irish who seemed to prosper in the matter. The hot-tongued orator left him unmoved.

Later he sat in the parlor of his little home pleasantly expansive after a good dinner, and brooded happily over his advancing good fortune. He felt so comfortable, that presently he drowsed, his chin on the top button of his fancy vest.

From this soothing Nirvana he was roused by an unwelcome din.

"What you doin' Ikey?" he demanded almost before his eyes opened.

The boy was marching noisily around an American flag flourishing upon a flagstaff made of his mother's broom stuck into a spittoon. He tooted lustily on a tin horn.

"I'm salutin' the flag," Ikey replied. "I done it the best at school teacher says," he added boastfully.

"So then," his father admonished him, "I don't want you should do it so loud." He gazed on the boy affectionately and proudly.

Bertha appeared in the doorway, a dish-towel in one hand, a plate in the other.

"They learn him at school that he makes a good American," she said fondly.

"Ain't I an American boy, father?" Ikey shouted.

"Sure," Breitstein answered placidly.

"A boy he makes a snoot on me today and he says, 'You ain't no American boy,' he says, 'whiles your papa he ain't born in

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the U-nited States,'" Ikey went on, his idle horn rattling on its cord tied round his neck. "Ain't he said it twicet—'your papa he ain't no American—you ain't no American boy.'"

"Huh!" Breitstein began.

"He wass born a little baby here," Ikey interrupted, "an' all his people a'ready, an'——"

"Shoo!" ejaculated his father contemptuously. "That there boy he don't know what he's talkin'. Listen! He wass born here. He didn't get no chanst to be born anywheres else. But me," — Breitstein swelled out his chest and tapped it with one dingy finger — "I don't got to be American. I waits till I haf all my senses an' iss growed up. Then I look about me goot, an' I says— 'I choose the U-nited States for my country like anything till I die.' An' I am nacherlized an' gets my papers so quick as I can a'ready. I am more American as that boy a'ready."

Breitstein beamed on his small son. He felt in his heart the stir of remembrance.

Ikey stood still and considered. It seemed good stuff to him, and he hoarded it up for the morrow to hand out to the boy who had made a snoot on him. He mouthed his horn anew and continued his clattering march around the flag.

Now some hours later, the Breitsteins having retired for the night, Breitstein woke out of a pleasing dream and turned over with a thump that made the bed quake. A thought had struck him—and with no love-tap. It swatted him—so to speak—fair between the eyes.

For Breitstein in this instance, was like the rocket we light on the Fourth—with no apparent result. We stroll up and investigate and ——

Bang! Whizz! Off she goes, and up, as good as if just lighted. A sort of deferred explosion, as it were.

For it was something the orator in the street had said, which had gone in at one ear, and for all any one knew, out the other. But now it took a sudden sizzle and began to do thing sto Mr. Breitstein.

"We can't all march with the soldiers, but by God we can back them up to the limit here at home! How? You'll know when your chance comes. And if you don't take that chance you're ——"

"An alien" was what he had said, Breitstein told himself, blinking in the dark. An alien—yes, that was what he said.

Breitstein grunted, turned on his back and jabbed the corner of the pillow.

"You might as well spit on the flag and be done with it."

It came back to him in short hot sentences.

The great deal that had simmered so pleasingly in his mind began to cool. And he saw for the first time that there was a black scum on it.

"Shoe-findings," Chowsky had said. "Vot iss shoe-findings? Paper—paper and glue."

Paper and glue in soldier's shoes! In the Government's tense moment anything would pass, if cunningly disguised.

But what would it mean to the soldier later?

Sore feet. Sore feet lagging on the way to victory.

Breitstein remembered how, at the time of the Spanish-American War, men had sold putrid meat to the Government—and rotten things generally. He had just been naturalized, and it had seemed strange to him that such things could happen in America. Yet here he himself was going to cheat the Government to which he had vowed allegiance—he was going to sting the soldier who would fight for him!

He groaned so intolerably, that Bertha half awake, groped for him with one large capable hand and patted him soothingly.

He tossed all night.

IN THE morning he sought out Chowsky. It was clear to him what he must do. And he did it, albeit sulkily and with a bad grace and no sputtering of patriotism.

He called off the deal. But he gave no reason—for shame.

Chowsky sat with his mouth ajar and still opening, as Breitstein left the office. He thought it a trick—a reaching after greater profit.

But on mature consideration, he failed to understand, and footed it 'round to Breitstein's office for an explanation.

But Breitstein saw him coming and locked the door against him. The deal was still a terrible temptation, and talking to Chowsky would add to his ferment.

So he played possum till Chowsky paddled down-stairs.

For he greatly feared that it should become known why he had refused the deal.

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In acting thus, he ran counter to his strongest instinct—his business sense. And while he had always been proud to wave a flag on the Fourth, and set off firecrackers for little Ikey, this—his first moment of real patriotism—made him feel a weakling, a "bum" business man, a "sucker" that all his friends would shoot out the lip upon, and laugh at behind open palms.

And so he mourned, his hat jammed tight on his head, his hands rammed deep into his pockets, kicking himself, metaphorically speaking, on the shins. And many times during the day he backed and wavered. A dozen times he was moved to rush after Chowsky and coax back the deal, even if it meant underbidding himself. But he stuck to his refusal, held by some curious and unwonted scruple.

Now it chanced that one of the great newspapers of the city sent a scribe into the back streets to find out "how the foreign element were taking it"—"it" being the war.

This young man, soaking up local color as a sponge absorbs water, ran into Chowsky emerging from Breitstein's doorway. He was attracted by Chowsky's opulent curves and his high state of emotion, and he asked an explanation—of the latter, of course, the former explained itself.

And what he got from Chowsky so excited his curiosity that he went up to interview the recalcitrant Breitstein. From that unhappy man he cajoled as much as he needed for an extremely interesting write-up of the Jew whose patriotism was more urgent than his sense of profit and loss.

And it just happened that the story took mightily, launched at a moment when patriotism counted. So the papers enlarged upon the theme, and editorials were written extolling "The Breitstein Brand," and the incident was made a peg on which to hang yards of eloquent exhortation. But of all this Breitstein knew nothing. His mind was not given to browsing upon editorials—and the same might be said with regard to all his friends. So he and they were ignorant that the forerunner of a new patriotism had appeared—and that Breitstein was the man!

Ignorant the latter was, also, of the fact that much war work awaited him, drawn by the glowing and unsought "ad" sifting diligently through the newspapers—ignorant too, that one day not far off, he would receive a letter franked with the mark of the White House, and signed by the President of the United States, commending Breitstein's action as that of a true American patriot—a letter that he would hang up on the walls of his home as its chief ornament.

But all this was in the future—and the devil of blueness was in Breitstein.

The next day he took Ikey to see the soldiers marching to the railroad-station. As they stood on the curb, Chowsky appeared with Goldberg—a conjunction that made Breitstein a degree more gloomy.

The soldiers swung into sight, khaki-clad and burdened with more than mortal man should be asked to put back under. The rise and fall of their ranks in movement, the militant music of their brass and drums, the occasional swirl of a forward-borne flag in the glory of its stars and stripes—all this gradually caught Breitstein up and set his heart pounding and his eyes glistening.

He leaned forward and looked up the street. As far as he could see they were coming—rank upon rank in an endless pulsation of progression. They would not march to glory on his shoes, but. . . .

He snatched at a soldier's hand as it swung, and wrung it fervently.

The man looked back laughing over his shoulder, and was gone—swallowed up in the ranks that followed. But something soft and unwonted remained with Breitstein—something that made his heart swell in his throat.

The ranks thinned. A cloud of yellow dust hung shoulder-high at the end of the street. The last flag was borne past.

Breitstein gazed at it as if for the first time, blinking a bit, for it looked blurred to his eyes. Something held him silent till it disappeared. Across the narrow street he could see Chowsky and Goldberg cheering like mad.

Ikey tugged at his coat.

Breitstein stooped and lent ear.

"Father!" the boy shrilled. "Blow mine nose!"

The parent drew a large handkerchief from his pocket and dutifully complied. Then, realizing his own need, he put it to his own beak and blew a blast that sounded loud in the lull that followed.

Ikey gazed up in wondering admiration.

"Father!" he shouted. "Iss it that you blow a horn on the flag yet?"

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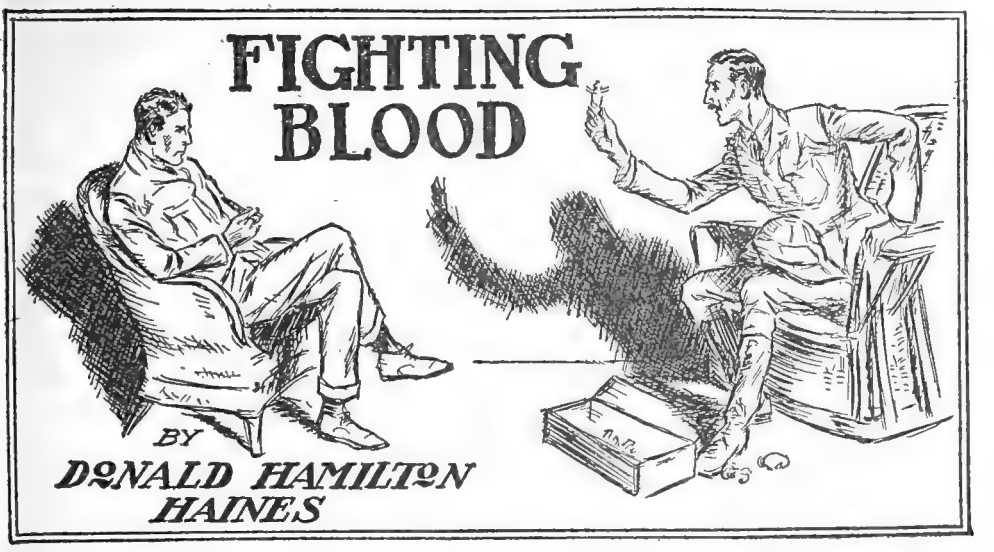
FIGHTING BLOOD



BY
DONALD HAMILTON HAINES

Author of "The Ten-Pins," "The Sacrifice," etc.

"HAD you asked me that question yesterday, I could not have answered. But now the man you are looking for is sitting at that corner table."

Burton turned and looked in the direction indicated. He saw a man with a brown skin, a queer, olive brown, and a figure of seemingly impossible thinness, dressed in warm khaki, with a battered sun-helmet on his knee.

"His name?" he asked.

"Gatlin," answered the Portuguese innkeeper.

Burton nodded his thanks and crossed the room. The thin man looked up at his approach.

"Mr. Gatlin," he began without preamble, "my name is Burton, and I've been told that you are the one man in Africa I want to see. Can you give me a little time?"

"Gladly," answered Gatlin. "But I can give you only advice, not service. I leave Africa for England this week. Just what is it that you want."

"A man who knows the jungle, the natives, the ivory-trade, and is a better shot than I am."

"I'm good for the first three," admitted Gatlin, "but if you are Travers Burton, as I think, I'm not sure of the shooting."

"I am Travers Burton," answered the other, "but I'm not in Africa for big game this time."

"No? What then, may I ask?"

"Well, ivory in the beginning."

In reply Gatlin stooped and picked up from the floor at his feet a wooden box some two feet long and half as wide and deep. Then before Burton's astonished eyes he began unpacking one after another little figures of carved ivory. There were savages, animals, birds, all carved with a wonderful wealth of detail, yet none of them more than two inches high.

After one breathless exclamation, Burton did not speak. The Portuguese and the loungers in the barroom crowded close. There was no sound except the breathing of the men and the faint click of ivory against wood. When the last tiny elephant had been set in place, Gatlin leaned back in his chair.

"What will you give me for the lot?" he asked.

Burton brushed the question aside with an impatient gesture.

"You may name your own price," he said. "What I want to know is where you got them."

Gatlin picked up the figure of a savage warrior and stared at it.

"It's a long story," he said, "and I haven't a great deal of time."

Burton summoned the Portuguese and indicated the empty glasses.

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"Go on," he said in the tone of one used to command.

"Do you know what it is to be poor?" demanded Gatlin.

"Oh, yes," Burton answered with a smile.

"No, you don't," Gatlin contradicted flatly, "or you couldn't smile when you say so. Just being broke isn't the thing. It's having five pounds when you need fifty, or fifty when five hundred stand between you and what means more than life.

"Four months ago there came to this sink of wickedness called Onal a man named Henry Lawler and his daughter. The fact that he has since killed himself with gin prevents my telling you what a worthless beast he was. But his daughter—I was on the dock when the dhow brought them in from the schooner. I saw her!

"You can't imagine what the sight of a handsome English girl is to a man who's been in the jungle for twelve years. When I looked at her I could smell the hedgerows in May and see the trim green fields and the cottages against the little hills! She was the very essence and breath of home!"

He noticed the surprise with which Burton was looking from him to the frowsy knot of loungers and laughed shortly.

"Oh, they know!" he said. "This is Africa, where things are either hidden forever or known to all men. And this wasn't a matter which could be kept hidden.

"There were two men, Folsom and myself—and the girl. It was one of those situations which was bound to have all the elements of tragedy or none. It just happened that neither Folsom nor I was capable of knifing the other or shooting him in the back. I don't know precisely what Folsom would have done left to himself. I rather bullied him into things. I knew that to condemn that girl to life in Onal was nothing less than sacrilege—and that it would kill her into the bargain. A man who would keep her in Africa was no better than her drunken father, who had brought her out to this stinking hole to take care of his worthless carcass."

"You mean that you and this Folsom talked all this out between you?" interrupted Burton.

"Of course," Gatlin answered quietly, then smiled at Burton's face. "England and the ways of Englishmen are a million miles away," he added.

"We agreed that neither of us should ask Esther Lawler to marry him until he had money enough to take her home and keep her there. At that moment I had precisely four pounds in the world, and Folsom six."

"An even start," observed Burton.

"Well, not exactly," answered Gatlin. "If a drunken native pilot hadn't smashed Folsom's coasting steamer on a reef a week before, he'd have been a rich man. He was known here and along a good strip of coast as a safe man and a money-maker. The loss of the steamer had been his one failure, and that was no fault of his. He could command credit, while I—well, even Miguel here had his doubts about giving me tick!"

The Portuguese spread his thick hands in a gesture of protest.

"Oh, it's all very well now," Gatlin said, pointing to the ivory trinkets, "but I'm free to confess, Burton, that I've been pretty much of a ne'er-do-well. I've had things in my fingers, but they've always slipped through because I was forever reaching for something else. So you see, it wasn't such an even start after all. Folsom had what he chose to borrow, while I had my guns and the clothes I stood in."

"You had four pounds odd," Burton reminded him.

"No, no!" interrupted Miguel. "Folsom had it all!"

Burton raised his eyebrows.

"We played poker at this table," explained Gatlin, "and Folsom stripped me."

Burton nodded. He thought that he had the picture. The big room sweltering under the oil lights and thick with smoke, a ring of intent faces about the table where the two players sat—Folsom cautious and sweating with nervousness, Gatlin grinning while he lost.

"Everybody knew that Folsom would probably go after ivory," Gatlin resumed. "He knew the game, it was the surest way to fair, quick profits, and Folsom was all for the safe ventures. A few days later, we watched him go into the jungle with his men."

"But what—where did the girl stand in all this?" Burton asked.

Gatlin drained his glass and set it down.

"In an hour," he replied, "I shall know. That's why I'm rather in a hurry."

"You've not seen her?"

"Not yet. I only came in, this morning."

Burton made no answer, but any one

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watching him closely would have observed a subtle change in his expression.

"It was nearly two weeks later that I went in," Gatlin continued. "I had two guns and four blacks. As porters they didn't amount to much or Folsom would have taken them. But we didn't have much to pack—no trade-goods. And Molu, my head-man, could talk to any man, black, white or yellow, in Africa."

"But what were you after?" Burton broke in. "Not these," and he pointed to the table.

"No, not those," admitted Gatlin. "I don't precisely know what I was after. One picks things up. I knew a chap who stumbled on a lot of drunken savages and made a pile of money out of the drug which had intoxicated them. And I knew I had to find something before Folsom came out with his ivory."

"And you tackled the jungle with four blacks and no outfit?"

"He would go naked and without his rifle!" exclaimed Miguel. "Neither beast nor black in the jungle will harm him!"

"It's not as bad as that," protested Gatlin. "But I do know the jungle, and for some reason, fever lets me alone. Probably because there isn't enough meat on my bones for it to get a grip on. Anyhow, the five of us went in blind, and the first six weeks were empty."

"Not to my ears," smiled Burton, shaking his head. "I want it all. Don't skip!"

So Gatlin went on. It was nothing less than the journal of a veritable jungle Odyssey that he gave them. There were no particularly dramatic parts, but to Burton, who had traveled only with a huge *safari*, the tale was more gripping than any fabric of romance, and his eyes never left Gatlin's face.

It was the story of the born adventurer, of incredible hardships accepted as matters of course, of unflagging efforts, repeated disappointments as one vague rumor after another came to nothing. And as he talked Gatlin's manner lost its nervousness, and he ceased to glance at the clock on the wall of the bar.

"Things came all at once when they did come," he said. "First Molu went down with the fever and we had to lay up. And while I was nursing him, there stumbled into camp one night two of Folsom's blacks. They were pretty well done up, and it was some time before I could get the straight of their story—and it wasn't a nice thing to hear.

"Folsom was in a bad way. Things had gone poorly from the start, and he'd pushed much farther north than he'd ever been before or than he'd planned to go. A woman can make even a chap like Folsom take chances. Finally he got his ivory!—and something more."

"Fever," said Burton.

"Fever, of course," agreed Gatlin, "but that wasn't all. I'm afraid Folsom isn't at his best trying to handle the natives. This time of all he should have stuck to ground that he knew. Of course in these days, when you find plenty of ivory it's bound to be in the remote districts where ordinary methods of business aren't always understood. There appear to have been hitches, and Folsom, who is a bit unimaginative, tried to force things when he should have waited. So just as the fever put him on his back, he found himself cooped up in a native village with a little war on his hands and a confoundedly ugly prospect.

"Now Folsom may not be all things that an ivory-trader should be, but he's plucky. He was helpless with fever half the time, but for all that he managed to keep his blacks in hand and beat off all attacks. The village, as I found later, was on a flat-topped hill, he had seven or eight guns, and a few of his blacks were fairish shots for natives. He had a cot rigged up so he could sit up and take pot-shots himself when the fever gave him a chance.

"Naturally he had sent some of his trustiest men for help, and two of them had slipped through. They'd left Folsom six days before, and it was certain that things must have gone from bad to worse in the meantime. So we started that same night.'

"Who started?" asked Burton.

"Folsom's two men and myself. Molu couldn't stand up, so I left him with the other three and what was left of the quinine. We made poor going of it, for Folsom's men were scared and had no stomach for going back into the mess. They'd loafed on the way out, but not so badly as I thought, for it was four days before I heard the bang of Folsom's twelve-bore express. It was a welcome sound: I hadn't been sure we'd be in time.

"Know much about African warfare?"

"Not much I'm afraid," admitted Burton.

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"So long as you fight the blacks in their own way, they stand up to it pretty well. They aren't afraid of the white man's rifles, but they're no tacticians, and there are two things that break their nerve—attacks from unexpected quarters and real sharpshooting. Combine the two and you've got 'em on the run.

"Folsom and the crew that were after his head were pretty well deadlocked when we got there. They had him penned in behind his stockade on top of a square-topped, cone-shaped hill, and of course he couldn't get out. Half-way up the slope was a good spring, and they could get water at night. And it's really hard to starve in the jungle. It was just a question of whether or not Folsom would get rid of his fever before they had his force whittled down to the point where the hill could be rushed.

"The situation didn't require much looking over. There was another hill a quarter of a mile away. The enemy could have used it, but, as usual, they'd overlooked a good point. It was easier to fight from cover on the low ground, and that's what they were doing. But the hill was made for me. I was just about half an hour getting into position after I'd got the lay of the land and spotted a few of their positions.

"You know, Burton, shooting lions or elephants isn't in it with shooting men when they've got weapons in their hands and are after your head! I got two with the first four cartridges. As I expected, that made some of 'em break ground and bunch together. Then I got four more.

"They were unholy good marks, you see, because instead of being naked, they wore a sort of white shirt reaching to the knees. I couldn't understand it, but at the moment I was thankful instead of curious. Because I had to do my bit by daylight. They'd get me fast enough at night. My job was to keep they're minds off the idea of trying to rush me. And after they found that every time a head or a bit of shirt showed, somebody got hurt, they didn't have much taste for the bare slopes of the hill. They kept me busy, and one beggar with an old Snider hit my helmet once in seven shots when I held it up on a stick, which wasn't bad. But there wasn't any rush.

"When night came it wasn't much of a trick to get inside the stockade. I did nearly step on one party of white shirts in the darkness, but I flushed 'em by making 'em think there were six of me."

"You did *what*?"

Gatlin laughed.

"Miguel here vows that the blacks won't touch me," he said. "He thinks I've some queer hold on them. I've never explained just what it was, because such a thing loses its value when it's known. But now that I'm not likely to need it again, here it is!"

He stopped speaking, then his voice came suddenly up out of the middle of the table. Miguel crossed himself and even Burton jumped. Then Gatlin's voice and other voices which were not Gatlin's spoke and laughed from different parts of the room.

"Any number of better ventriloquists are getting poor pay in London music-halls," he said, "but it just happens that I'm the only one on the East Coast of Africa.

"Well, I found things in pretty bad shape behind the stockade. The fever had played hob with Folsom as it does with big men, and it wasn't through yet. I must have looked pretty good to him, but the first thing he said was:

"'I've got the ivory, Gatlin! Now what in blazes shall we do?'

"But for a few days there wasn't much chance to talk ivory. The besiegers took a lot of beating, and then after they'd given up, Folsom did his best to die on my hands. —What is it?"

For Burton was smiling.

"Oh, nothing," he answered, "I was just wondering how many times in history one man had raised a siege single-handed!"

"Any good shot could have done it," Gatlin answered carelessly. "And there'd have been no need had Folsom been on his feet. Anyhow, quinine finally pulled him through while I stood by and watched. And while I waited, there were matters I wanted to look into. The white clothes of our late besiegers were still in my mind.

"It wasn't a hard matter to find some. There had been rushes which had only stopped close to the stockade, and I didn't have far to go. As I had expected, the man wasn't a full-blooded African. He was smaller, not so powerfully built, had a lighter skin and lacked the full, thick lips and broad nose. Now and then you find a nest of these cross-breeds, relics of the

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palmy days of the slave-trade when the most active slavers were bands of Arabs. Some of them stayed in the country and interbred, and their offspring are an unlovely lot, combining the worst features of both races.

"Not wishing to have the air of the place worse than it was, I set Folsom's men to burying the dead as soon as I was sure that the fighting was over. I bossed the job myself—which proved fortunate."

He leaned forward and picked up one of the ivory baubles, a sting serpent through whose head had been drilled a tiny hole.

"One of the dead wore this around his neck on a copper wire," he said. "I found only the one, but that was enough. I wanted to start that night, but I couldn't leave Folsom, and I didn't trust any of his blacks. I had to wait for Molu."

Gatlin paused and lit a cigaret.

"Those were the hardest days of waiting I ever passed," he confessed. "There was Folsom beginning to show signs of life, and the village fairly choked with his ivory, while I had this one trinket, and the men who had brought it were getting farther away every minute. I kept praying that they'd come back, but they didn't.

"Molu crawled in, shaky but all right, while Folsom was still hanging on the edge of the black pit. I began questioning him the minute he appeared. Yes, he had heard of a race of brown-skinned men somewhere to the north. There his knowledge and interest stopped. When I told him that we were going after them, he turned a sort of gray—which told me plainer than words that he hadn't confessed all of his knowledge. But I knew he would go where I told him because he feared me more than he did any cross-breed.

"So the instant Folsom passed the crisis, we started."

"But didn't that give him every chance to get back here with his ivory ahead of you?" demanded Burton.

"It gave him a chance, of course, but what else could I do? As I had an unfortunate prejudice against sticking him with a spear and walking off with his tusks, there was no other course open to me. And anyhow, his chance was none too good if I made any sort of time myself. He wouldn't be fit to travel himself for some days, and his forces had been so cut down by the fighting that he'd have to have more men before he could bring out his ivory.

"Following those white-shirted breeds was easier work than you might imagine. Stung by their reverse at our hands, they'd cut up every band of blacks they'd run across. It was easy as tracing a cyclone! As we got close to their village I worked out my plan. Naturally, I couldn't go in as an armed white man. So I tried another idea."

He unbuttoned his shirt, and Burton saw that the skin of his breast was a queer, sickly green.

"Molu was the best part of two days painting me," he explained. "The stuff doesn't show on my hands and face much now, but I was a pea-green beauty when he got through with me. I had to do my work rapidly and at night, because no white man can stand many hours of the African sun without clothing. So one evening, I left Molu with my clothes and rifle a mile or so from the village and crawled in."

"He is mad!" exclaimed Miguel.

"No, I wasn't quite as bad as that," answered Gatlin, "but I'll admit I was pretty desperate. It had never occurred to me that Folsom would beat me, and the prospect of defeat was unbearable. But the thing that almost made me ill was the ever-recurring thought that perhaps there were no more of the ivory ornaments.

"I'd spotted what I thought was probably the temple, a big grass hut in the center of the sprawling village. That would be the storehouse of the ivory ornaments. Thanks to a good sense of direction, I crawled to it through the darkness without making a row. Inside it was black as your hat, and I was afraid to browse around much for fear of making a racket. I groped an inch at a time. The one thing that made me pretty sure I was in the right place was the stench, which nearly knocked me over. The first thing I put my hand on was these trinkets. The second was a human face. That gave me the creeps, because it was cold. But it reassured me and explained the odor.

"I can't really say that waiting for morning in that hideous hole was a pleasant vigil. I had to keep my mind off the other things in the place by picking these up one by one and trying to estimate the value of the lot. The first streak of gray light showed me a row of grinning heads set on stakes and a sort of altar with these ivory

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things on it. Then I folded my green legs, sat up like a stone Bhudda and waited.

"It was a priest who found me. He evidently came in for early devotions somewhere around six o'clock. At sight of me he let out a yell and bolted—for which I don't greatly blame him. I couldn't have been a pleasant sight. After that, for half an hour, there was the most awful hanky-pancky in the village. I couldn't tell whether my scheme was working or whether they were getting ready to come in and finish me. But when I saw the priest and chief come crawling through the narrow doorway on their bellies, I knew that part of it was all right.

"Four mortal days I was a green god to those heathen. Between my gruesome appearance and the stunts I did with my voice, I turned them into the most cowed pack of savages in Africa. I had to communicate with them by signs, and I also delivered long addresses in English and Spanish. The latter seemed to impress 'em particularly. Finally I made 'em understand that these ivory toys were at the bottom of my displeasure and their recent defeats. I almost caused disaster that way. I just stopped the priest dumping the lot into the fire.

"After that there was no particular trouble. On the fourth night, there was a religious orgy which left most of them laid out stiff. I didn't even have to crawl out. I just stuffed these things into a box and walked out to where Molu had been waiting for me."

He broke off abruptly, and Burton was the first to speak.

"And Folsom?" he asked.

"He ought to be here in a week or less," Gatlin answered with a laugh. "I didn't have much of a margin."

"And you're for England this week?" Burton asked.

Gatlin nodded and pointed to his treasure.

"That spells a good passage home for two and a fair start in the old country," he said.

"Yes," admitted Burton, "it's easily good for that. I'm sorry you're going. I thought perhaps I could interest you."

Gatlin glanced uneasily at the clock.

"What?" he asked.

Burton wasted no time in preliminaries, but went straight to the heart of the matter, and not only Gatlin but Miguel and the loungers listened breathlessly and without speaking.

It was a thing dazzling to men of their stamp which Burton unfolded. He aspired to nothing less than a new kingdom in the jungle. He drew a convincing picture in glowing colors, the ivory trade monopolized and regulated, their own ships waiting in new ports that would spring up along the coast to carry out the ivory and other things—for it wasn't to stop with ivory. He made them catch their breath with a picture of the jungle not tamed but harnessed. It was like a story of the Conquistadores translated into terms of the present.

"There's no question of finances," he finished. "Between myself and a few others, the money's found. I came out here to find the men for the pioneer work, men who know the jungle and love a fight for its own sake. Because for a year or so, of course, it will be more fighting than anything else."

He pushed back his chair and rose. Nobody else moved.

"Sit down!" Gatlin said sharply. "When do we begin?"

Burton laughed with the full, easy tone of a man satisfied with what he has done.

"My dear fellow," he protested, "you can't take a woman into the jungle or ask her to wait for you!"

Gatlin stretched his lean figure to its full height and grinned.

"I'd make a fine specimen of the model husband, wouldn't I," he demanded. "And anyhow, Folsom ought to get out of Africa. It'll kill him if he stays."

He dismissed the entire matter with a gesture.

"Now go on!" he commanded.

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GASTON OLAF AND BIG BUSINESS

A FOUR-PART STORY
PART I

BY

HENRY OYEN

Author of "Gaston Olaf," "Little Marie," etc.

I

A DAWN-WIND as cheerless as ever blew night out of a Northern Autumn sky came whimpering down the Little Wolverene River, and Gaston Olaf François Thorson, pacing the deck of the overladen steam scow, *Jeanne La Perle*, threw up his head and scanned the star-filled sky.

"Daylight's coming, Captain!" he called. "Steam's up, too. Throw off the rope, and let's pray your old scow don't sink before she gets to Frostbite Landing."

"She's apt to sink, all right, the way you've loaded her," drawled the gaunt captain from aft. "She couldn't stand another man's weight without lapping water."

"That's all right. I've chartered her for this trip. She isn't going to stand another man's weight."

"I ain't so sure of that my black self."

"What!"

"C'm here, Big Feller." The captain jerked his thumb toward the shore. "See that gang laying around the big fire?"

"Yes."

Gaston looked at the dozen men rolled in their blankets about a fire on the bank near where the boat was moored. The firelight, flickering upon their eyes, showed that they were wide awake.

"What about them?"

"They intend going North with us, that's all. I been ashore and heard 'em talking. They plan to make a rush just as we cast off. After they're aboard they'll take charge if they have to. It's a case of let 'em aboard, which'll be dangerous, or fight the minute we cast off a rope. And they're a dozen."

Gaston Olaf sprang lightly ashore.

"I'll give them a little something to interest 'em, Cappy. When you see that I've got 'em going, cast off and ease out into the stream. Then blow the whistle once."

"You——?"

"I'll get aboard—alone. Do as I say."

He lurched up the bank toward the fire. He staggered a little and hiccuped as a man might who was quarrelsomely drunk. Over the outstretched legs of the largest man at the fire he tripped and stumbled distressfully, sprawling his whole length upon the man, leaping up in apparent excess of rage, and delivering upon the big man in the blanket a futile, clumsy kick.

"Trip me up, will you, you big stiff! Stick your legs out where I have to fall over 'em, eh! Get up, you bum, and I'll show you some manners."

The man got up. He arose in a whirl of flying blankets, fists, and swear words.

"You big stew!" he bellowed. "Think you can talk to me that way?"

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He swung viciously at Gaston who, clumsily dodging the blow, managed to trample on several others about the fire. The result was quite what he desired. In an instant the interest of the men was shifted from the boat to the man who had so rudely trampled upon them, and Gaston was fighting half a dozen, staggering away from the river, leading them away from the boat with each blow.

When he saw that the entire dozen had left the fire, and that no one was watching the boat, he placed his back against a pine and, with his face toward the river, made a stand. To the astonishment of the attackers, he seemed suddenly to become very sober. In the half-light of the fire his white teeth were revealed in a boyish smile and his eyes were snapping.

"Come on, boys!" he called gaily, knocking an assailant to one side with a slap of the open hand. "Who's going to be the next lucky man?"

His laughter rang loud in the timber as they closed upon him. His long arms worked like swift flails. He struck only with the open hand; and the row of men before him grew three deep. Like a great boy engaged in a rough game of tag, he forgot the boat, forgot his stratagem, forgot everything in the joy of combat.

No man can fight a dozen. Gaston Olaf's assailants, thwarted in their first rush, now closed in on him from all sides.

"Pull him down, boys!" panted the leader. "Clinch 'im, pull 'im down."

The fight became a whirlwind with Gaston its madly revolving center.

"Come on, boys!" he bellowed defiantly. "Help yourself to the mustard!"

They came. They realized now that they had caught a Tartar, but this was the time of the Wolverene gold rush; fighting along the river just then was more common than eating, and they were twelve.

"I got 'im, I got 'im!" cried one of them as he threw himself forward and got a hold on Gaston's legs. "C'm on, finish 'im!"

A blow took Gaston Olaf in the back of the head. He staggered for an instant.

"We got 'im!"

"Toot!" shrilly spoke the siren on the steamer. Gaston stiffened. He plucked the man away from his legs as if he had been a boy of fourteen.

"You've got him, eh?" he cried, charging straight into the mob. "All right; keep him —if you can."

There was a whirl of flailing arms, of flying legs, bodies; then Gaston broke through the line and ran for the river. He reached the bank before his assailants comprehended his purpose. The boat was swinging rapidly out into the current, each second widening the gap between it and the shore.

"Jump!" called the captain, and like a flash, Gaston went into the air. His feet landed on the extreme edge of the unrailed fore-deck. For a flash he hung there precariously; then the captain seized him and dragged him to safety as the boat swung out beyond reach of the baffled men.

Back at his wheel the captain growled furiously.

"I've seen prize idiots enough in my life, but you take the cake. Tackling a dozen men before breakfast and enjoying it!"

Gaston laughed and, stalking forward into the bow, began to sing:

Only once more back, said the gallant sailor
As he kissed his weeping wife;
Only once more back to the golden treasure,
It will last us all through life.

"'At'll do," came wearily from aft. "You've sang that twelve times by actual count since yestiddy. Any sober man who feels good enough to sing before sunup ain't human."

"It's sunup now, Cappy," laughed Gaston as the sun broke through the timber and lighted up the stretch of the river ahead.

A wind came down-stream, a gentle day-breeze, with a tiny hint in it of the Arctic ice flats upon which it was born, a warning of the Winter that was crowding on Autumn's heels. Gaston, baring his bronze curls to the pale sunlight, drew the essence of the North into his great chest in gulps.

"You can't beat it, you can't beat it!" he murmured. "That's the North, the good old Snow Country, and it certainly does feel good to have it inside of you."

He turned on the gaunt captain who had come slouching forward.

"Sniff of it into you, Cappy! Don't it start the hair on your chest to wiggling? By the eternal pines, it's a man's country, this Wolverene country; you've got to be a man to belong and it belongs to men!"

The captain morosely tamped the fire in his pipe.

"Yep," he drawled. "Thought the same way my black self a week or so ago."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

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"Le's see. How long since you went out, Big Feller?"

"Thirteen days. The man down at Mile 220 that Tom Pine and I bought our sawmill of had discovered he could get three prices for it from somebody else, so he was holding it out on us. I got him to go for a little walk in the woods."

With a smile of mischievous reminiscence he waved his hands at the large crates that composed most of the *Jeanne's* deckload.

"There she is. Tom Pine'll be waiting for me with the team up at the Landing, and I was bound he wouldn't be disappointed."

"Thirteen may be unlucky for you, Big Feller. A lot of things happen around a gold-camp in that time, and they been happening some swift around Wolverene since you left. Yessir, they been happening almost as swift as they did the time of the first rush. You say it's a man's country. Wall, it was. Now it's going to be a 'business' country, and the individyooal man won't belong. You know the Universal Mines Syndicate that's been prospecting around lately? Well, they're on the job now."

"Oh, as for that," said Gaston, "it never was a poor man's camp. It's all low-grade stuff here, and that makes it a milling proposition. That's why Tom Pine and myself quit fooling with the rock and are going to make lumber."

"Yep. All right. But I mean that Big Business has come to Wolverene, and when those slick desk fellers and their lawyers move in, us old wood-ticks move on. And the syndicate has sent up their big ace to win this camp for 'em."

"Their big ace?"

The captain eyed Gaston's proportions with a speculative eye.

"Man of the name o' Bradley. Head business man for the Universal Syndicate."

"I never heard of him."

"No? Well, I'll guarantee you'll get over that by the time you get back to Wolverene."

"Why so?"

"Huh! Wait and see. They're on the job permanent, and don't you forget it; their office crowd is a-comin' in. Two of 'em went up last night, engineer and a business manager. Get that, Big Feller? Business manager! He had his sister with him, too; that means they're settling down. And say—that sister—umm!—Purty? Purtier than five twenty-dollar gold pieces—Yessirree, Big Feller; you wait an' see."

"Wait and see what? What do you know?"

"Jest enough to keep my mouth shet, Big Feller; jest enough to know what's good for me."

Gaston started in surprise at the new note in the captain's voice.

"Well, I'll be darned!" he chuckled. "This man, Bradley, whoever he is, has put the Indian sign on you and scared you to death. Out with it, Cap'; what'd he do to you?"

"He didn't do a thing, not a thing. But I been ramming around the edge of things fifty year now and I don't need nothing done to me to tell me when a change is going to happen in a new country. I seen it too often. I can tell when ol' Mr. He-Man, the Boss of a new country arrives."

"What!"

The captain nodded sagely.

"I ain't sayin' nuthin', not a word. You jest 'member what I say, that's all."

"This man, Bradley, you mean?" Gaston's neck had stiffened and his chin was going up. "You mean he's going to be boss?"

"I ain't sayin' nuthin', not a thing. The graft's good with this little scow o' mine, and I want to run 'er as long as they'll let me."

"Let you! Holy smoke, man, you talk as if you were in the city with a policeman on every corner. This is the old North, isn't it? Since when do we have to ask anybody to let us do anything?"

"I heard him talking to the assistants he brought up with him," the captain went on without replying to Gaston's outburst. "He looked the scow over.

" 'We'll supersede these with faster gasoline boats,' he sez, 'until the railroad comes through.'

"He leaned over the rail right where you are now and looked at the timber and he says: 'Hello! Lots of lumber there. Lot of it going to be needed. That will be a big side issue in itself. We'll have that, too. Has any one cruised it?'

" 'Yes,' sez some one; and they mention you and Tom.

" 'None of our men?' sez he.

" 'There's enough rock to mill at Wolverene without bothering about side issues,'

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sez one of the assistants. Bradley looks at him.

" 'You get a timber cruiser to work at once, Harris,' he sez. Brrr! It sounded like a dripping icicle. 'Give me a report a week from tomorrow.' "

The captain glanced sideways at Gaston.

"Hm. Seems to me I heerd you say something about you'n your pardner doing some lumberin'?"

"You know it," replied Gaston firmly.

The captain again scanned Gaston critically.

"Wall," he drawled, "I'll say this for you, Big Feller, I've only seen one other gent go up this river who's as well built and seasoned as you be."

"Who was that?"

"Mr. Bradley."

"Fine," snapped Gaston, throwing up his head. "That's the best news I've heard since Tom and I got out timber rights." He swelled his chest with the nipping air. "She's one old he-country, that's what she is, and there's always something happening to keep a man from getting fat. Cappy, Cappy! If you got a heart, shove your steam up to the blow-off point and let's get up as soon as we can." He smote the rail enthusiastically. "It's a harder job than ever now, and a hard job is a —— fine thing."

"You're young; you're looking for it," said the captain, shaking his head. "Don't worry. It'll be there when you get to Wolverene, but it is light enough to speed up a little now."

He walked aft and kicked the sleepy half-breed, who, galvanized into action, hurled pine-knots into the boiler until the ancient valves leaked. The paddle-wheel clacked more vociferously, the scow trembled more, and its nose split the current at perhaps an increased mile an hour.

Gaston continued to stand in the bow as the boat thrust on. The news that he had heard had neither alarmed nor troubled him. That the mining syndicates were trying to control the Wolverene district was no news to him. That they might try to control the timber was not alarming. He and Tom, joining in the first rush, had seen at once that it was a camp for capital rather than the individual. They had located and sold for a few thousands their first claims. Then, being logging men by training, they had seen the fortune to be made by the first lumbermaker who could supply the demand from the madly growing towns of the district. They had timber rights to forest sufficient to keep their mill running two years. Bradley, whoever he was, had better keep his fingers off the buzz-saw or they might get hurt.

Two hours after daylight, the *Jeanne La Perle* poked her bow out of the narrow river into the little mud lake in which the stream had its source and puffed noisily across toward its landing. The gaunt captain grinned sardonically at Gaston's exclamation as the landing came in view.

"Yep. There's been a little change, Big Feller, since you went out. Yep. Quite a little change."

"A change?" said Gaston. "Why, man, it looks like an insane asylum had turned loose."

II

FROSTBITE LANDING that brisk Autumn morning richly deserved just that description. The atmosphere of beauty and majesty of a primitive forest had been rudely thrust aside by that bustling, imperious creature, Man, and the moody pines looked down upon a scene from Bedlam. Row-boats, rafts, scows, canoes, dug-outs littered the beach. The beach itself was trampled into a mire by the hurrying crowd. Men waded from boats in mud above their knees, reached high ground, looked about and demanded:

"Which way is Wolverene?"

Boxes and crates of machinery were piled high on the dry ground. A medley of swearing men and sweating teams surrounded the piles. Other wagons, waiting until they were loaded black with men, drove madly northward to the tune of oaths and threats from men who were left behind. Men leaped on loaded wagons and were knocked back on to the ground. Others strove to mount the horses and were driven off by the drivers' long-lashed whip. And the sound that came from it was the weird one of scores of excited men talking, hurrying, jostling, swearing at once.

"There's Tom!" exclaimed Gaston as he made out his stocky, grizzled partner at the water's edge. "Yo ho, Tom! How they been coming?"

"Like the old days, boy, like the old days," came back the cheerful response.

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"I been waiting here two days and somebody's tried to steal a horse off me every other hour. You missed something, Gaston. My knuckles 'ud be all skun up if I hadn't worn gloves. Something doing every minute here." He cupped his hands and called softly:

"Something doing, right now!" He jerked his head toward the crowd. "Hurry up; don't miss it."

Landing the *Jeanne La Perle* consisted of running her flat nose upon the trampled beach as far as it could go, while Gaston leaped ashore with a rope and anchored it to a convenient stump.

"What is it? What's the excitement, Tom?"

Speaking out of the corner of his mouth, Tom said:

"Take a careless sort of look around and notice what's up in front of the hotel."

"The stage-wagon, you mean?"

"Ey yah. Notice the crowd eying it."

Gaston looked again. The slight, two-seated wagon, with a driver on the seat, stood waiting at the entrance to the one-story log hotel. Near it stood a group of eight or ten men, their heads close together, their eyes on the wagon.

"Two white-collared college boys who've got a girl with them—sister to one of 'em—have got the rig hired," explained Tom. "The gang's getting ready to rush it. Fair enough, too. Anybody fool enough to set down and eat breakfast and leave a rig standing loose round a place like this deserves losing it."

The driver, seeing the storm brewing, leaned toward the door of the hotel and shouted. His shout determined the crowd of men; they rushed for the wagon as two tall, well-dressed young men came running out from the hotel.

"They're after the wagon!" cried the driver. "I told you not to leave me standing here."

"Get away there," commanded one of the men. "Get back."

"Get back ——, you white-collared ——!"

"Good work!" cried Gaston. The young man had promptly smashed the mouth that had uttered the foul words. The fight broke with that blow. "They know the fighting word when they hear it and go to it like a shot."

"Yes, but they'll get the holy tar kicked out of 'em," retorted Tom critically. "That's a rough crowd they're stacking up against. Hit. They can fight, though, them boys."

Gaston and Tom viewed the fight with the calm eyes of connoisseurs.

"That's good sense," said Gaston as the two youths placed their backs to the wagon. "They can't get behind 'em now. Very nice, very nice hitting, Tom."

For a while the outnumbered pair held their foes more than even, striking resolutely and true, with swift, snappy punches that went straight to the mark. They dropped a neat little row of men before them, before they were marked.

"They're doing well, darn well, them boys," said Tom admiringly. "They got the idee, and they're a pair of game-cocks but they hain't got the heft. You'll see."

His prediction proved correct immediately. A large man dove out of the crowd, took a blow square in the face, and dropped one of the boys under the wagon with a terrific blow to the body. Gaston's hands clenched and Tom Pine fidgeted until the young man was on his feet again.

"I s'pose we hain't got no right butting in," he said sorrowfully. "Seeing as the boys went looking for it——"

"No, we mustn't butt in," agreed Gaston. "I've had my morning's morning. Ah! Look at the dogs!"

Angered at the stubborn fight put up by the young men, a pair of the attackers had drawn black-jacks. At the sight of this, Tom Pine carefully removed his mackinaw and cap and laid them in a dry place. Gaston followed suit.

"Luck certainly comes our way," chortled Tom.

Not a word did they speak, not a blow did they strike as they shouldered and pulled their way to the men who were using the weapons. Tom Pine's man was tall and big-jawed. Tom calmly measured the distance from his square fist, held low down at the knees, to the man's jaw. Then he bent sideways as if to pick something from the ground. "This is the billy we use in the bush," he said, and with a leap swung his fist to the mark.

"Nicely struck, young feller," laughed Gaston as the tall man dropped with a clatter. He warded off a blow from the man he opposed, a huge brute with city-gangster written large on his flat face. Gaston tore the man's billy away, and put up his hands.

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"First, a black eye," and his left went true to the mark. "Then a sore mouth;" the left cut his opponent's lips. "And then a knock-out, to teach you to fight fair."

His left darted in a feint at the solar plexus, and as the man's guard came down the right knocked him heels over head and dropped him senseless back among his fellows.

The fight stopped suddenly. The gang looked at Gaston, then at their fallen companion, and silently dragged the latter away.

"Twice in one morning is going some," laughed Gaston. "But it certainly is what I call a perfect way to start a nice brisk day."

"It does start the blood moving," chuckled Tom. "Even though it wasn't more'n a bite."

"A bite!" good-naturedly groaned the young man who had done most of the fighting. "You must have awful appetites. I confess I've got enough."

His right eye was swollen half-shut, his lips were split, but there was no mistaking the cheerful nature of the smile that broke over his damaged countenance.

"My name's Loomis and my friend's name's Drake," said he, holding out his hand, "and we certainly are obliged to you gentlemen. You saved us from a first-class trimming."

"They were too many for you."

"They're a lot of scum, a lot of dirty rats, and they'll pay for it to the limit!" Loomis's companion, who was staggering from the effects of punishment, lurched toward the men as they retreated.

"Do you hear?" he screamed, shaking his fist at them. "You'll pay for this, you rats. You cheap scum, you dirty bums. I'll make you pay for laying your dirty hands on me."

The retreating men stopped, facing about and scowling darkly.

"Boy!" Gaston's hand fell on the enraged man's shoulder and drew him back as if he were a child. "Where you from?"

Drake glanced up, squirmed futilely against the hand laid upon him, and grew calmer.

"Boston. Why——"

"Do you want to go back?"

Drake flared up.

"In a nice little six-foot box of whipsawed lumber? If you do all you've got to do is to make that sort of a crack a few times more and you'll be on your way. Here, stand up! What's the matter?"

The young man grew deathly white, swayed, and Gaston's arm alone saved him from falling face down on the ground.

"Knocked out on his pins, he was!" cried Tom. "He'll be sick for a little while. No, miss, he ain't hurt none. Just got a bat in the bel—I mean the stomach. He's all right."

Gaston turned and beheld the person to whom Tom had addressed his final words. It was a girl of perhaps twenty. She was standing in the hotel doorway. She was tall and girlishly slender, and there was about her, her apparel, her complexion, her hair, her attitude, the tale of the finer things of civilization. She was out of place. That was Gaston's first thought. It was a man's country, and she was as some one from another sphere, a steam-heated, massaged and perfumed sphere, from which Gaston's untamed nature, at home only in the free spaces of the North, shrank instinctively.

But Ethel Drake was fair as she stood there with her lips and doughty little chin held firm, though she held one hand against the rough logs to steady herself, and the other hand unconsciously pressed her trembling bosom. She was one of those girls whose beauty and charm always prompt man to make smooth the way, and Gaston, through the French half of him, was supersensitive to feminine beauty. He stood and looked at her in a spell.

Was there anything finer in the world than a creature like that? Anything better to do than to win the love of her?

Gaston shook himself and looked away. He had no time for such softness. The project upon which Tom Pine and he had set themselves was first above all. It was everything until it was accomplished. It had nearly cost them their lives, through being caught in a blizzard and lying all but starving in a rock cairn for a week while timber cruising. They had sworn then that they would live through the storm, had sworn that they would force the timbered valley in which they lay caught to yield them a fortune. They would do it. That was a man's job. That was better than the softening yearning for a beauty like this.

"He's only fainted," said Gaston gruffly, and swinging Drake upon his shoulder he stalked past the girl into the hotel, laid his

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burden down on a sofa, bowed and stalked out. "Get the team, Tom," he called roughly, over his shoulder. "We got some man's work waiting for us with those crates."

Tom lingered.

"Bashfulness, just pure bashfulness," he chuckled to the girl as her eyes followed Gaston in surprise. "Don't think for a minute he ain't as much obliged to your party as I am, 'cause he is. He appreciated the chance to get the blood circulatin' early in the day same's me; but he's so bashful sometimes he don't know what he does."

"Bashful!" gasped the girl. "I should have judged he was anything but that."

"Well, sir—miss, that's what he is," continued Tom swiftly. "You wouldn't believe it. Me'n' him was prospecting up in Tisdale township last Spring and a tub of a squaw—I mean a fat Injun lady that had a rich-looking claim says to him: 'You be my man you gettum my claim.' He jest took one look and ran. Bashfulness, miss, jest pure bashfulness. But it paid that time; the claim didn't pan out after all. Yessir," Tom ran on, looking out of the corner of his eye into the room where Drake lay. "Men get that way when they live a lot in the woods. Now, take that name on that scow there. See it?"

"*Jeanne La Perle*," read Miss Drake. "What a romantic name!"

"Yep. Named after a biscuit shooter down at Mile 220."

"A 'biscuit shooter'?"

"Grub-slinger—waitress, I mean, miss. That hungry-lookin' old cap'n there saw her jest once. Too bashful to up and speak to her. Saw that his scow and Jeanne were built a lot alike, so off he goes and paints that name on the side. Can't tell what those bashful ones'll do."

He glanced inside again, and his manner relaxed.

"It's all right for you to go inside there to your brother now, miss," he said. "I was just talking against time to keep you out of there. I've seen men have fits and foam after a hard punch in the g—in the stomach, I mean. But he's all right, and by gosh, so are you."

Miss Drake gazed at him in complete astonishment.

"Why—you—you extraordinary man! Why didn't you want me to go in there?"

Tom fidgeted and coughed before replying.

"Well, you see, it mightn't 'a' been nice. It might have hurt you to see it, miss, and you're too young and purty to be hurt, miss."

"Well!"

Astonishment left her speechless for many seconds during which she stared incredulously at Tom, finally seeing the fine heart of gold that shone in his bright old eyes.

"I didn't have any idea that the men up here were capable of such fine feeling. I didn't imagine you rough men could be like that."

She glanced toward the beach where Gaston, graceful as a panther and strong as a bear, was pulling full tilt on the tie-rope to warp the scow farther in shore.

"Is he—like you—like that?" she asked.

The light of loyalty, of adoration even, that came into Tom's eyes was unmistakable.

"He's Gaston Olaf, miss," he said warmly. "There's only one of him, and they never made 'em any finer since the world began."

Gaston looked up at that moment. Miss Drake looked swiftly away and turned to go in. She paused with one foot inside the threshold.

"Will you thank him," she said softly—"for me?"

III

"HERE with the team, Tom! Rust'le your stumps and come running with the outfit. We've had our morning's fun. Now for man's work!"

Gaston had dragged the *Jeanne* up as far as she would come, and, springing aboard, came to grips with the first heavy crate of machinery.

"Yo heave 'er and heave again!"

The frail scow trembled as Gaston tilted one end of the crate, poised it for an instant, and tipped it over.

"Hey, you, Big Feller!" drawled the captain. "Can't you tip 'em a little easy?"

"Nope! It takes three men to let 'em down easy. One man alone has to let 'em go—like this."

"Ouch! What you want to do, break me up in business?"

"Yep. Shiver your timbers—unless you and your Injun have brotherly love enough to come forward and lend a hand. Yo heave——"

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"Don't! For the love of Mike, don't tip 'er again," pleaded the captain. "Jim, you go forward and help the gentleman handle his baggage gentle-like."

"And heave again!" The crate went over again, and the scow shivered.

"I'm coming—I'm coming, too!" wailed the captain. "Oh, what a man you are—singing before daylight, bashing up poor, little black-jackers, and now shaking my palatial river liner to pieces 'less I turn stevedore and help you."

"Get hold of her boys!" Gaston thrust half-breed and captain to their holds on the crate. "Now—over! That's the stuff!"

The crate went down the *Jeanne's* sturdy plank to the beach; Gaston clapped a huge hand upon the shoulder of each of his helpers and dragged them back to the next piece to be moved.

"Tie into it, boys! Hello! There's the team. Shake 'em, Tom, and get busy!"

Tom brought the large, four-horse wagon as close to the *Jeanne's* bows as he could without miring the hind wheels. Apparently his reputation had been firmly established during his brief sojourn at the Landing, for though men by the score eyed the large wagon threateningly, computing aloud the numbers which the four powerful logging horses could transport to Wolverene, a way was made for him and not a man tried to clamber aboard. When they saw that Gaston, too, had an interest in the outfit, the men promptly found something to hold their attention elsewhere.

"All of which goes to show," commented Tom drily as he clambered down, "that if you want to be left alone, the thing to do is to show that you're a —— of a fightin' man and don't care what happens."

"Pree-zactly. Or do something like this."

Gaston tossed on to his shoulders a casting that had taxed the captain and half-breed to lift and stalked off with it to the wagon.

"By the great pike pole! A hard job is a fine thing," he exploded boyishly. "And why? Because it's a fight; because it's something bucking you; something says you can't budge it. And you set your jaw, grab a-hold, stiffen your spine, and—stick! And then you win; and there can't be anything finer than that, and—and room to crow about it," he added laughingly, swelling out his chest.

"Jest a boy again, jest a boy," said Tom. "Minute ago you was all hard and business-like, now you're yourself again."

"Am I? And what is myself, Tom Pine; do you know? No. Neither do I. Every once in a while a new spring breaks out in me somewhere. Then I know I haven't got myself all surveyed yet. When was I hard?"

"When you toted that guy into the hotel and come out without a word to his little sister."

Gaston's ebullition vanished and he was serious for a while.

"'Little sister?' I didn't see she was so little."

"You didn't see her at all, that's what you didn't, Gaston Olaf."

"Yes, I did."

"You did ——"

"Yes. But I looked away in a hurry. And I'm going to keep looking away until we win this game—till we've got it licked. Gad, man! We've got to lick it. It nearly killed us. We've got to lick it; and I'm going to keep looking away—looking away from all of them—from everything but business—till this game is won!"

"All right." Tom nodded grimly. "I'm with you, you know that. Only one thing first—she asked me to do something for her."

"Then do it."

"She says to thank you—for her."

"All right. Now you've done that; forget it and wade in and help yourself to the mustard."

He was in his element; a difficult task in hand, and the great outdoors to do it in. He sang and laughed as he worked. He drove himself and those working with him, and when the wagon was loaded, he tossed his cap into the air.

"Get up there and drive, Tom," he shouted. "I'm going to walk ahead and spot the pitch-holes for you."

He drew back, an instant later, hiding behind the loaded wagon, as Drake, Loomis and Miss Drake emerged from the hotel and prepared to enter their wagon.

"Let them go ahead, Tom," he muttered. "We don't need any company on the road."

He knew that the less he saw the girl the less would his thoughts be drawn to her beauty, and he held his eyes away.

The captain of the scow looked from the trio to Gaston and chuckled in his gray beard.

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"City chaps." He clambered to the bow of the *Jeanne*, dangled his long legs over the side and spat with great expertness and expression. "I wouldn't 'a' moved a lick to save 'em from gettin' their heads drummed off. City chaps. You don't know 'em, Big Feller. Some time you may be sorry you didn't let the boys kill 'em off, specially the pale one, Big Feller." The captain again displayed his powers of expectoration. "Bradley's men. Schemers. Business manager, the Drake one; engineer, Loomis. The laugh's on you, I guess, Big Feller."

Gaston did not reply. He stood looking at the ground. The stage-wagon started with a flourish.

"Good-by, good-by!" called Miss Drake gaily waving her hand at Tom.

"See you in Wolverene!" called Loomis.

Drake sat glowering at the crowd that parted before the speeding team.

"Huh! We may see you before Wolverene," muttered Tom. "New driver, that; don't know a thing about horses, starting off on the trot on a road like what he's got ahead of him. They'll be lucky if they get that team to Wolverene at all."

"Tom," said Gaston when they were a piece on the road, "have you heard anything about this man, Bradley?"

"Sure."

"What do you know about him?"

"Not much. He's manager of the syndicate mines. There's a lot of talk."

"What kind of talk?"

"Of what a son of a gun he is for grabbing things. That's what you heard, I reckon?"

"Yes. The captain said——"

"Well, don't you believe it. Just talk. Bradley he comes to me where I'm finishing up the log-dock outside o' the mill and he spoke to me like a white man.

" 'You got a good thing here,' he sez.

" 'A good thing,' I sez, 'if we put 'er through.'

" 'Oh, I guess you'll put 'er through,' sez he.

" 'Logging's as uncertain as mining is,' sez I.

" 'Yes, but I've heerd about you fellers,' sez he. 'You'll put 'er through, all right, and I'm glad we've got somebody in this camp who can do it. We need you fellers in our business,' he sez. 'We're going to put up a half-million-dollar milling-plant on the Home mine alone,' sez he. 'We'll need some of your lumber pretty quick. Any help I can give you, lemme know,' sez he."

"What kind of man is he?"

"We-ell." Tom shook his head. "He's a hard one, there's no doubt about that. He's as big as you are, Gaston Olaf—heavier, I guess, and he's got an eye on him like a wolf that's had the benefit of a college education. But it's all business with him—everything. I bet he'd shove his brother's arm against a buzz-saw if it was good business; and as he sez, he needs us in his business, so we're on high water. That mill order alone will keep us sawing 'most all Winter."

Gaston nodded. He remembered what the captain had said about Bradley ordering one of his assistants to cruise the timber about the district, but he said nothing. After all, it was possible that Bradley had decided that it would be poor business for the syndicate to go into the logging business on the side, and there was no need to alarm Tom with what at worst was only a suspicion. Tom's description of Bradley, supplementing the captain's, whetted his interest.

"All right, young feller," he laughed, starting off again. "Let's get to Wolverene and see what we shall see."

Harder trails have gold-crazed men traveled than the road that led to Wolverene Lake, but probably never one more desolate, or less inspiring. The region was a swamp. Nature had displayed more than usual cunning in concealing from man's eyes the treasure which she had stored underground. Atop the quartz-bearing rock she had spread swamp mold, atop the mold she had grown a dense crop of trees. It had availed nothing. Time, supplemented by rain and frost and wind, had worn the earth from the highest of the upjutting streaks of rock.

Some say it was an Indian who first brought a piece of the queerly streaked stone out of the desolate northland. Others contend that the stone fireplace of an abandoned cabin, the stone coming from the outcropping of rock upon which the cabin stood, first set some unknown North-woods soldier of fortune on the Wolverene trail.

Now nature's dominance over the Northern fastness was gone. That bustling, imperious creature, man, had rudely thrust her aside, and now the miserable, miry road to Wolverene was filled with scores of vehicles and hundreds of foot-travelers; with

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foundered horses, muddied to the belly, with broken vehicles, and with the whines and curses of covetous Jasons, delayed in their progress to a goal where nine hundred and ninety of a thousand had no business to go.

The road, frozen on the surface, had been broken through and churned into a black streak of sticky mud. Wrecked vehicles lined it at the rate of one to every quarter mile. Some of these had been abandoned forthwith, their owners pushing forward empty-handed in quest of the golden fleece. Upon others men sat perched, whining for help, cursing, or accepting Fate stoically, according to the consistency of their spines.

IT WAS near the middle of the short afternoon when they came upon the outfit bearing Drake and his sister and Loomis. As Tom had predicted, the unskilled driver had pushed his horses over the cruel road till they had dropped.

They now lay panting in an opening beside the road while the three passengers looked about ruefully.

"Hello! Here's luck for us," cried Drake as Gaston and Tom hove in sight. "Here's a ride."

"There is for the young lady," said Gaston promptly. "But you'll notice that I'm afoot."

"Get aboard, miss," called Tom reaching down a hand.

She came toward the wagon and paused. She was standing near Gaston and some distance from her brother and Loomis.

"Ray—my brother—is not accustomed to walking," she said softly to Gaston. "He has not entirely recovered from that cruel blow. He is tired——"

"So are my horses," said Gaston.

"But surely"—her smile was the assured one of a girl who has become accustomed to regard her slightest whim as law to the men about her—"surely you don't think of horses before——"

"Yes. Before myself or any other man."

He was not smiling. Ethel Drake felt something like anger. She smiled in her most effective manner.

"But you don't quite think of your horses before a woman?"

He looked her up and down calmly.

"You don't weigh over a hundred and thirty," he said. "They can stand that."

He turned away.

A tiny red spot showed in each of the girl's cheeks.

"Bashfulness, miss, pure bashfulness," whispered Tom Pine. "He's so flustered he don't know what he's saying. You jest jump up here and get out of that cold mud."

She turned toward her brother. Loomis sprang toward her.

"Let me give you a lift, Ethel," he said, making a rest of his hands. "Ray and I are going to walk."

"Thanks, Will." She leaned a small hand on his shoulder, but she was looking at Gaston's stiff back as he walked away. "You're always kind, Will."

"Up you go!"

With a laugh and a flutter like a bird she went up into the high seat.

"All aboard for Wolverene!" chuckled Tom, gathering his team together.

"Hold on," said Drake patronizingly to Gaston. "I don't like walking. Here's ten dollars for a ride."

Gaston looked straight ahead.

"Twenty-five." No response. "Oh, come; what's your price?"

Gaston turned around.

"Mr. Drake," he said, "you can't ride on that wagon."

Drake started at the sight of the devil that suddenly flared up in Gaston's eyes. Recovering himself he laughed easily.

"Oh, very well, no harm intended." But as he and Loomis stepped out after Gaston, his smile vanished and he muttered:

"We'll see about this later on."

Ethel Drake had not observed the passage between her brother and Gaston. Not even a perfect Autumn day of brilliant sunshine and intoxicating air could lend glamor enough to that scene to render it attractive, and she shuddered a little as she looked about her.

"And do they really find gold in—*this?*" she asked, waving a gloved hand at the desolate wilderness.

"A few do," replied Tom. "Most don't."

"But is it like this up where the gold-mines are?"

"Just about. Some places the swamp is a little swampier, and some places the rock is a little rockier, but she's just about the same all over the dee-strict."

"Imagine," she said, nodding at a stretch of black loam, "finding gold in mud like that!"

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"You don't find it in the mud. There's rock under the mud. That's where the ore is."

"But how strange! It doesn't look as if anything so precious as gold belonged here. It's depressing. I can't imagine gold in such a region."

"Well," said Tom, shifting the reins, "it does sort of stretch the imagination to the cracking point to think of anything valuable laying out under this mud waiting for somebody to come along and find it. As you say, miss, it doesn't seem gold can belong here, and it don't. You just ask any mining sharp and he'll tell you the same. Time o' the first rush the sharps looked at the samples of rock and said: 'No sir, there can't be no gold in that Wolverene rock; gold don't belong in that formation.'

"But you can't tell. Always makes me think of Joe Le Bar who was cooking in a camp I was in down on the ol' Wiscons', way back in the old days, you know. Joe had a bare spot right plumb in the middle of his crown; hair wouldn't grow there, and it was thick and bushy and red all around. Like an old cl'aring in the timber.

" 'Bob-cat do that, Joe?' says I to him one day.

" 'No. Wife,' sez he. 'Wanted me to sing in the choir. Powerful churchwoman. Grabbed me there on Sunday morning when I was sleeping late.'

" 'Let go, my love,' says I, pulling one way.

" 'Come to church, you brute,' says she, pulling 'tother. Powerful, big woman. I hit the trail after. Hair wouldn't stand it. . . . Ten year ago. Hain't seen her and hain't lost any hair since,' sez he, and he pets the bald spot melancholy-like.

"Well, sir—miss, I mean—Joe and I hit Tommyhawk town together one Spring after the drive, and there's a big circus-tent and a camp-meeting just going to start.

" 'Tom,' sez Joe, 'I ain't been to church in ten years. Don't you think it would do us good to get a little religion?'

" 'Can't tell; let's try,' sez I.

"So we go in and take a seat way up front near the organ. There was some nice, sad tunes played and sung, and Joe and me settles down on our spines, proper mournful and ready to enjoy a good spell of sadness, and then a big lady steps out on the platform—and I feel Joe choking beside me.

" 'Get out,' says he, shoving me.

" 'What for?' sez I.

" 'Don't stop to arguefy,' he whispers. 'Get out!'

"I see by his face that it's life or death, and we get up and sneak for the entrance, Joe's shoulders up to his ears. When we hit the open air he lets out like a buck that's been shot at and missed and I take after him. 'Bout three mile out of town I catch up with him getting his wind on an old windfall.

" 'Too wicked to stand it, was you, Joe?' says I. He looks at me like a man who's been handed tea when he needs licker.

" 'You ol' fool, you,' he howls. 'That was my wife!'

"Now, that wife didn't have any more business being there than gold has in this Wolverene rock; but there she was, and here *it* is, and that's the way things go."

Miss Drake looked slyly at Tom.

"Does your bashful partner tell stories as well as you do, Mr. Pine?" she asked mischievously.

"Steady, boys, steady there!" Tom Pine dextrously guided the four horses around a miry spot. "Who; Gaston Olaf?" He chuckled. "Tell stories—that boy? No! He lives 'em. Yessir, miss. And if they don't come fast enough he tears loose and makes 'em happen."

Gaston Olaf trudged on without looking back and without speaking to his companions. Loomis he liked, the young fellow's manly good-humor having attracted him from the first, but Loomis was a Bradley man, and the cautiousness of the woodsman warned Gaston not to be friendly until Bradley's attitude toward the lumber project was clear. Drake he did not like at all. To Gaston the young business manager was the clever—even crafty—indoor type in epitome, and as an outdoor man he instinctively felt suspicious of him.

The girl—Gaston turned his thoughts on the problems ahead, grimly held them there, and doggedly tramped on. As his mind pictured the task that lay before him, he forgot his companions and the girl. He warmed at the prospect of the struggle. And as always when there was a struggle before him he lengthened and quickened his stride, eager to reach the place of crisis, to come to grips and have it over with.

He drew away from Loomis and Drake, who strove in vain to keep up with him. He forgot the heavy mud which clung at his

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boots, seeking to delay each step, and swung on light-footed. His chin went up, little by little, and presently he began to hum; and thus, just before dark, he rounded a turn in the road and came to a sudden stop.

Down the road, straight at him came a galloping horse whose rider lashed it furiously. The horse was a large, raw-boned bay, lathered with perspiration, and blowing jets of steam from distended nostrils, but huge and wild though the mount was, the man on him dominated the picture. At sight of Gaston the rider threw his horse back with a jerk that lifted the brute's big snout straight toward the sky.

For a moment the two men faced one another silently in the half light; Gaston Olaf on foot, yet a figure to rivet and hold the other's attention, the newcomer sitting quietly in his saddle, paying no attention to the gasping struggle of the enraged horse. Presently the beast grew quiet, as if quelled by the sense of two greater forces meeting.

"Hello, Bradley," said Gaston quietly.

"Hello, Thorson." Bradley's reply was in the same tone.

Neither moved an eyelash or spoke again for some time.

"Did you happen to see anything of a party of three coming to me, Mr. Thorson?" Bradley's tone now, with the addition of "Mr." was the formal one of a well-mannered man speaking to a man to whom he has just been introduced. "Two gentlemen and a young lady?"

"Yessir; you'll find them just a short piece down the road, Mr. Bradley." Gaston bowed and smiled.

"Indeed!" Bradley returned the bow. "Just a short piece, you say?"

"Just a short piece," said Gaston and stepped to one side.

"Thank you," said Bradley. The bay lunged forward; the meeting was over, but as the horse flashed past, Gaston saw the surreptitious, sidelong glance of the rider's eye.

Gaston looked around him into the gathering dusk. His eyes were flaming.

"By the eternal pines!" he said. "He's got a bad eye, but by —— there goes almost as much man as I am myself."

He stood looking into the gathering dusk in which Bradley had disappeared.

"Now why," muttered he, "should a cool card like him get restless about that outfit? What have they got that he's impatient to see? The girl——?"

He started, surprised at the shock which this thought dealt him.

The girl? That young, beautiful girl? Why she was scarcely more than a child and Bradley—Gaston swore impatiently, not at Bradley, but at the fashion in which his thoughts persisted in running away with him when the picture of Ethel Drake entered his mind. . . . Of course it was the girl.

What of it? Gaston demanded of himself. That was none of his affair. She—or any other girl—had no place in his life—at present. His existence at present was concentrated on the Shuniah Valley lumber project; until that was accomplished girls would affect him no more than the Spring sun affected the outcroppings of rock along the road. The job was the thing! Nothing else—and then he recalled the sly sidelong glance of Bradley's eyes and started for Wolverene on a lope that verged on a run.

IV

THE Wolverene that greeted Gaston Olaf as he swung out of the woods in the dusk of the evening was a sight to make one pause, wonder and perhaps smile. It was, in truth, a mere collection of makeshift structures thrown together on either side of the black mud road. The road had widened generously to become Main Street, but considering the oozy composition of its surface it was doubtful if this was to be considered an advantage. Stumps of trees chopped down in snow-time reared their four or five feet heights in the middle of the street; tree-trunks lay where they had fallen, and brush-piles were scattered about promiscuously.

The buildings were even more eloquent of the feverish haste and carelessness with which the town had been started. Lumber being practically unobtainable, logs and canvas had been substituted. It was a town of cabins and tents. Tent saloons crowded tent real-estate offices; a tent church had for neighbor a log-cabin restaurant. There were tent groceries, a tent photograph gallery, a tent tailor-shop, and a large and prosperous tent "tea-room."

Gaston hurried down the street without stopping. Men recognized him, invited him to stop and drink, but with a word and a laugh for each, he declined, and went

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on. At the Empire Music Hall the lamps were being lighted, and a woman's rich voice, a laughing, care-free voice, singing a careless song, swelled out into the street for an instant as the door opened and closed in admitting a new patron. Gaston stopped. He looked at the canvas above the door:

"Ada Adair, The Northern Nightingale."

He hurled himself on with a jerk.

"More skirts! You cut 'em out—all of 'em, you hear?"

And in the same second he wondered if Ethel Drake could sing.

Beyond the town, on a tongue of land where Tisdale Creek ran into Wolverene Lake was the mill site. The mill-building, log-docks and booms were ready, waiting the machinery. The timber which Gaston and Tom owned was up the creek, and the logs would be driven down the stream to be converted into lumber by the waiting saws.

A light gleamed in the crude office building and thither Gaston hurried at once.

"Hi, boss! Did you bring 'er back with you?" MacLean, the carroty-haired foreman leaped to his feet as Gaston entered. "Did you get the stuff?"

"I got the stuff all right, Sandy," replied Gaston. "How's everything?"

"Fine and dandy, boss. Got everything all done and waiting. We're ready to saw logs as soon as a saw is spinning."

"How's the camp?"

"Going good. I was up yesterday. The bunk-house and stables are done. So's the road. They'll start dropping timber Monday."

"Good." Gaston sat down. "Sandy, have you been around town lately?"

MacLean grinned good-naturedly.

"Boss, since you've been gone I haven't even touched a glass of 'near-beer'."

"I don't mean that. Have you been around where you could hear the talk of the camp?"

"Been down at the hotel every evening. Everybody's doing it."

"Sure. You heard anything about Bradley?"

"Huh! I should say I have. You couldn't be in this man's camp a day without hearing about that buck, 'less you were deaf."

"Heard anything about him that might concern us?"

MacLean looked up, studied Gaston's expression, and shook his head.

"Not a thing. What d'you mean?"

"There hasn't been anybody monkeying around the mill or the camp? You haven't seen anybody up in the timber who looked as if they might be cruising it?"

"Hmm." The squat foreman suddenly wrinkled his brows and stared at the floor. "Well, now, come to think of it, there was a couple o' fellows up looking the camp over. Just rambling round they were."

"Who were they?"

MacLean smote his thigh in self-reproach.

"Danged if I ever thought of it before, boss, but come to think of it they were a couple of the syndicate's explorers. Why?"

"Nothing—maybe. Has anybody been around the mill?"

"Sure. First saw-mill in the district is kind of a curiosity, and we've had our share of visitors. Bradley was out here his own self. Rode out on that big nag of his. Said he hoped we'd be making lumber right away because they needed a lot bad for their big new plant."

"That's all? You haven't heard anything about the syndicate going into the saw-log business themselves?"

MacLean rose, whistled and sat down again.

"Hmm. So that's what you've been hearing, boss? Well, they are buying property, you know. They bought the Hoo-Hoo and the Black-Hat last week, and I hear they got the options of George Hollender's claims up in Whitney and Noisy Smith's stuff over in Tisdale. Paid the first price asked, I hear. With that and the Cupola and the other mines they owned they're the big people around here, all right; but as for their going into the timber business, no, I haven't heard anything like that."

"None of these parcels they've been buying have got timber on them?"

"Nope. All rock. Fact is, there ain't any timber worth logging round here except what you got. And of course they wouldn't try to gobble that."

"I heard they were out to gobble the whole camp," said Gaston, "and that they had an appetite for timber, too."

MacLean chuckled heartily.

"Well, if they try that they'll be apt to get more than a mouthful. The boys up in camp would just enjoy a little trouble.

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This camp's too —— peaceful, anyhow."

"Well, you're not to say anything to the boys or any one else about what I've been saying," said Gaston, rising. "Maybe there's nothing to it. Our motto's going to be 'Shut up and make lumber.' And keep your eyes open Sandy, and come to me if you see anything that looks queer."

From the mill Gaston returned to town and entered a large log store bearing a sign: "The Trading Post." The place was Crowley's, the largest merchant in the district, and Crowley dealt in everything from canned eggs to real-estate loans. He was seated in his little office in the rear of the store, a tall, cold gray figure, when Gaston entered, and he promptly rose and held out his hand.

"Ah, young man! Glad to see you. Bring the mill with you? Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, you can go over a few things with me, Mr. Crowley," replied Gaston Olaf. "I've had a whisper that things aren't going to be as free and open in camp as they used to be, and that a man's got to watch what he's got."

"Competition always increases as a town develops," replied Crowley. "It's a good sign; if you've got to guard what you've got it's a sign that you've got something worth having."

For he shall take who hath the power,
And he shall hold who can.

"A good business rule that, Thorson. Now, what was it you wished?"

"First of all to be double and triple dead sure that Tom and I have got our timber rights so secure that the devil couldn't find a way of making us slip up on them. You acted as agents for the owners of the rights so you must know."

"I do. I'm surprised at your asking. I know the law, and I went over the deal carefully. The timber privilege is yours as surely as if you owned the land."

"All right. Now, about grub and tools for our camp. There's no room for a slip-up there?"

"Certainly not. I sent two tote-loads out today. I've taken the contract to supply your camp, and I fulfil my contracts."

"And you haven't forgotten your promise to help us meet the pay-roll in case we run short?"

"Not at all. We've gone over all that before. I've got a couple notes waiting for you to sign when you need the money." Crowley leaned back and peered closely at the younger man. "Now tell me what's disturbed you, Thorson."

"I'm not disturbed," replied Gaston, "but this thing is so big I won't run any risks of a slip-up; and I've heard that the big syndicate is a greedy outfit."

"A business outfit! Mr. Bradley is a strong, pushing man, just exactly the sort of man we need to make this camp hum. He's a business man, Thorson; you ought to learn things from him."

"I intend to. Where does he hang out?"

"About this time of day you'll find him in his room down at the hotel," replied Crowley, looking at his watch. "He's using a couple rooms there for his office for a few days until he has a building put up, and he hears reports from his engineers at the end of the day."

"Then I'll drop in on him and see if I can learn something," said Gaston. "I certainly do like to learn."

HE SHOULDERED his way down the street and into the crowded hotel. When he had ascertained that Bradley was in his room he approached the door and knocked.

"Who is it?"

"Thorson."

The door was flung open.

"Come in, Thorson." Bradley, who had been in conference with Drake, was holding out his hand. "Mr. Drake has just been telling me of ——"

"I came to have a talk with you about something else, Bradley," interrupted Gaston bluntly. "You look to me like a man who's big enough to tell the truth—are you after our timber, or aren't you?"

Drake, who had been sitting, rose nervously, drawing back, but Bradley nodded quietly in approval of Gaston's abrupt words.

"I am after your timber," he said. Drake drew back a step farther. Then Bradley added:

"When you get it sawed into the lumber and are ready to sell me some."

The tension vanished with Bradley's ringing laugh.

"I'll be frank with you, Thorson," he continued, "I did think of going after the timber by-product here. If I'd been here

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earlier I'd have those timber rights, not you. But you've got 'em now, and you know the lumber game. It wouldn't be good business for us to go after you now; if it was, I'd go after you. But we need lumber, and we need lots of it, and need it in a hurry. You can make it for us better than we can do it. So that's the situation. Will you get any stuff down the creek before it freezes up?"

"We hope to run one small drive," replied Gaston, controlling his surprise. "It's a swift creek, down-hill all the way, and won't freeze till late."

"I speak for the first cut right now, for our new plant. We'll give you the order as soon as our Mr. Loomis has the plans drawn. Do you want a deposit to bind the order? No? All right. See you later. Glad you dropped in. Good day, Mr. Thorson."

"Whew!" Gaston Olaf ran into Tom Pine outside the hotel. "Tom, I've been conversing with a human cyclone."

"Name o' what?"

"Name o' Bradley. And, Tom, do you think we could break the law and get a nice little, large man-sized drink of hooch? And then a nice little meal, say about four pounds of bull beef? And then a little recreation? Because, Tom, after talking with that guy I feel plumb empty, body and soul."

V

NIGHT had fallen. Night in a Northern swamp at that time of the year is very gloomy, indeed. But Wolverene, in spite of its reputation as a "near beer" camp, was alive and throbbing. To counteract the darkness, Wolverene had done its best to turn night into day, indoors. Electric lights had not reached the camp; but the merchant who had had foresight sufficient to order lamps, large and small, and kerosene and carbide, in quantities apparently out of all proportion to the needs of the place had reaped a fortune. Wolverene glowed, an incandescent pin-prick in the vastness of the black swamp, and about the lights men swarmed in thousands.

Mackinawed men from Nome borrowed matches from men in riding puttees from Rhodesia; canny Glasgow capitalists shouldered reckless speculators from Goldfields; a monocled Londoner walked next to Wall Street's luckiest gambler. A babel of tongues rose into the night. French-habitant lumberjacks, tassel-capped shaggy, and swarthy, rolled out their patois neither understanding or being understood by the neat Parisian bankers who stood near them. White trappers from the Hudson Bay country conversed gutturally with Indians; the strange Dutch of Boers resounded side by side with the "boid" and "thoid" of "New Yorkers."

"I believe I shall have a drop of tea," said the Londoner.

"Go to it, kid," rumbled the board-of-trade man from Chicago. "I'll have a little with a wink myself."

The sale of strong drink was prohibited, "near beer" being the staple on which the liquid entertainment of the camp was legally based, and open gambling was likewise tabu. So unless one had the price, strong liquor was unobtainable; and unless one had money or credit, games of chance were not to be dallied with. It was not open, but it was all there. Music and song flourished abundantly beneath the lights.

The Empire Music Hall had the call on the crowd tonight, the attraction being Ada Adair. The hotel buzzed with tales of her beauty, her voice, her superior qualities. She was no common gold camp follower, ran the talk. She was no professional singer even.

"She's a gold-hunter, same's the rest of us and just as game and white's any man as ever tapped rock," said a man from Nome. "Saw her up at Dawson, last year. Sang there, too, till she got a stake, then went out on the cricks and made a nice little strike. Sold, and went out like a lady, by —— and half the district crazy to marry her."

"She was at Goldfields, too," drawled a lank Westerner. "I think she dropped her stake there in a hotel she started. Then she went on the stage, I heerd."

"She came here with a small stake," explained an old-timer. "Bought a couple of prospects that didn't prove up. She's singing now to get another stake to try it again. Game? Why, all she'd have to do would be to say 'yes' and she could have any one of three dozen new millionaires."

"She ain't strong for the swell ones," chuckled another. "Hear about Bradley trying to chin with her? She was having

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a bite in the tea-room when he comes in.

"'What? You here?' he says.

"'No,' sez she, 'I'm not here. I'm 'way back in California.'

"She froze 'im up. He looks black and goes out. I see it myself. No, she don't fancy the big bugs."

"Sounds good to me," said Tom Pine. "If there's anything makes my old heart feel young, it's to see a purty woman sing."

"I swore this evening I'd cut out women," responded Gaston. "Cut 'em all out—quit thinking about 'em—till the job's done."

They were standing before the Empire.

"Yes?" murmured Tom. "Well, I'm too old to need to do anything like that. You're sure you're set on that, boy?"

"Sure," said Gaston. "I'm going——"

The door flew open. The full, rich voice of a singer, the voice he had heard earlier in the evening, came to his ears. He looked at Tom. Tom looked away, grinning.

"Two," snapped Gaston, thrusting his money at the ticket-seller. "Come on, Tom," and he threw open the door and stepped inside.

The hall was large and well filled, but as Gaston strode up the aisle all eyes turned to him, and the girl on the stage paused in beginning a new song. Gaston, too, paused when he saw her clearly. His eyes lighted, first with amazement, then with appreciation. He had expected to see a woman painted and powdered, reeking of artificiality, and smirking behind her paint. Instead, he beheld a woman as natural as all out-of-doors.

Her skin was a warm brown, tanned by sun and wind, gloriously rosy with health. She was dressed in a plain black gown, the sleeves ending at the elbow, and the white forearms were round and firm to look upon. She was tall for a woman, and slender, but beneath the slender roundness was a suggestion of panther-like strength lending complete confidence to her bearing.

Gaston was half-way up the aisle when he stopped. It was only a pair of seconds, probably, that they looked at one another. A miner whispered to his neighbor:

"Lord! What a pair!"

Gaston went on and took a seat at a table squarely before the stage. The orchestra struck up. With a smile that won her audience at once, she began her song:

A laddie who's out on a flyer,
Tells tales that run higher and higher,
Of gold that he saw that was sticking out raw;
But—the fact is the boy is a liar!

The audience roared. That kind of liar was flourishing at Wolverene just then.

A miner will show you a sample;
The gold streak is there and it's ample.
Then he'll sell you his claim, and Oh, it's a shame!
But the truth is he borrowed.

"Right-o, miss," shouted an Englishman honestly. "I purchased one of those claims myself."

The place became a scene of hilarious applause. In the midst of it Gaston saw the smile fade on the girl's face. It was only for an instant. Then she was smiling again, though Gaston saw it was by an effort. She stepped close to the front of the stage and waited for the tumult to subside for her last verse:

A girl with the roll of a piker
Came here to let Fortune's bolt strike her,
But instead of the frills, she picked porcupine quills
And, boys, she's darn glad that you like her.

The building rocked. Men rose to their feet and cheered. They pleaded with her to come back. When they realized that this was in vain, they cheered her till the lamps danced.

"Why, I think she's sweet!" Through the diminishing storm of laughter Gaston caught a voice that prompted him to turn in its direction. Bradley, Loomis, Drake and his sister were seated at a table near by.

"You bet! She's all right!" Loomis was applauding generously with Miss Drake.

Ray Drake smiled a sarcastic smile. Bradley shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"Don't you think she's good, Mr. Bradley?" said Ethel.

"Oh, I wouldn't say good," replied Bradley. "But if she has entertained you, she has served her purpose."

"Who is she? Do you know?"

"No," said Bradley, showing his good teeth in a smile. "But as you see, she is billed as 'Ada Adair'. I suppose then her name really is Peggy Mulligan, or something similar."

"I don't believe it," retorted the girl. "I—I think she was charming. I'd like to know something more about her."

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"Well! We'll see jolly well that you don't eh, Mr. Bradley?" snapped Drake. "You must realize that you are in a mining camp now, Ethel, and the sort of women——"

"Ray!"

"The sort of women who follow mining camps are not fit——"

Drake's speech ran down suddenly. He seemed to become conscious that some one was glaring at him, and looking around he saw Gaston Olaf. The expression upon the latter's face seemed to fascinate Drake. He not only ceased speaking, he shrank back, seeming to wish to make himself invisible. Gaston merely sat and looked at him. Drake squirmed and looked away. He met similar expressions. Other men were regarding him in the same manner as Gaston. Drake swallowed something.

"I mean—I am speaking in generalities, Ethel," he explained loudly. "Of course I didn't refer to the—the young lady who just sang—not at all."

"That's nice," said the girl. She had failed to notice the change on her brother's face, but Bradley had seen, and he turned his eyes toward Gaston.

"Hello! There's that Thorson who gave you the ride," he said carelessly. "Nice-looking sort of fellow that."

"Splendid!" said Ethel.

Bradley looked at her, and scowled. She was looking steadily at Gaston. "But something of a boor, isn't he?" concluded the girl.

Bradley's scowl disappeared in a satisfied smile.

"Oh, Mr. Thorson," he called genially. "Won't you come over and join our party?"

Gaston had thawed. The music, the song, the singer, the crowd, the laughter had awakened him. Music to him was what champagne is to many men. Under its influence the warmer half of him bourgeoned forth, showing itself in the happy light in his eyes, the boyish smile upon his lips.

IT WAS a different man who rose and joined Bradley's company. Ethel Drake saw and marveled. Could this man, whose eyes snapped with animation and the joy of life, and whose white teeth gleamed in boyish smiles at the least excuse, who bowed and chatted graciously be the man who had treated her so coldly, even sullenly, on the road? What manner of man was he? She had never before met a man like this.

"I wanted to see you, Thorson, about a little rush order of lumber," said Bradley easily. "We want——"

"Business?" laughed Gaston. "Dear man, 'the whistle has blew' for me. Business for the present does not exist. But stay, yes, the business of life exists, which is to enjoy, to relax, to forget care; be soothed and thrilled by music, amused by song, uplifted by woman's beauty—in short, to live! Lumber? Man dear, you wouldn't shatter the pleasant spell by anything so ordinary as—lumber?"

Young Loomis, whose twinkling eyes indicated how well he understood Gaston Olaf, laughed and applauded.

"Good stuff, Mr. Thorson!" he chuckled. "Spiel on."

Drake regarded Gaston with the expression of ineffable hostility which the hide-bound office man holds toward anything outside his immediate ken.

"I didn't know a man could get a quick jag around here," he said, looking vaguely around.

Gaston's frank, unhostile laughter rang out in response.

"Didn't you, Mr. Drake? That's unfortunate for you. The Snow Country's the place for quick jags; didn't you know that. Why, I've stood on hilltops when the wind was tearing the snow off the ridges and dusting the valleys with it, and I've got roaring drunk in three minutes with the feel of the scene. I've stood on a creek bank when the white ice was loosening in the Spring, and I've found myself with a singing jag just from seeing the good old brown water again when the ice went out, and hearing the old crick begin talking to itself again.

"Quick jags? Why, man, I've been out on the snow-flats at night, when the world was just a white, smooth speck in an ocean of darkness, and the stars were white and near, and the Northern Lights were crashing up the sky-line like music from a hidden orchestra; and I've stood right there, scared drunk—religious drunk—like an old Ojibwa when he feels the Great Spirit taking hold of him.

"And an old wolf way off on some ridge sticks his nose straight up at the stars and wails, because there's something up there

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that he feels, and it's so big it scares him because he can't understand. And my dogs sitting right down in the traces and sniffling, and I've stood there minutes with my cap off and my head bowed, scared-drunk, with the bigness of it, and something else that nobody seems quite able to explain. Drunk! Why, man you don't know anything about being drunk unless you've got drunk on the old-fashioned, pure outdoors of the Snow Country. Liquor? Champagne? Brandy? Hooch? Pooh! You take those things indoors, and indoors—Bah!"

There was a pause as Gaston ended his speech and threw himself laughing back in his chair. Bradley's expression at the outset had been one of idle amusement, but he looked at Ethel and saw that she was following Gaston's words with bated breath, her eyes upon the young giant's lambent countenance. A thorough business man was Bradley, but something as wild as ever showed in the eyes of primitive man leapt into his eyes at that sight. He looked at her more closely as if doubting what he had seen. But it was there; there was no doubt of it; the look *he* had hoped to awaken in Edith Drake's eyes, and the look was for Gaston Olaf.

Bradley broke the silence.

"Very pretty, Thorson," said he quietly. "What is it from, may I ask?"

Gaston sobered for an instant, but the flood of good-humor was running too strongly within him to be checked.

"I forgive you, Bradley," he laughed. "You don't know me much or you'd know that I break out that way every once in a while without the aid of books, hold-outs or other unfair devices. It's from the heart," he said, bowing extravagantly, "only the heart."

"Hmm," was Bradley's skeptical response.

Drake, aping his superior, smiled skeptically. When Bradley spoke again there was nothing in his tone or manner to suggest what had just passed.

"If I may mention such an ordinary subject, the lumber we want first of all is to build a house for our business manager, Mr. Drake, and his sister."

"Ah! But in that case lumber is not an ordinary subject," retorted Gaston with a bow to Ethel. "How many thousand do you want, Bradley?"

"Mr. Loomis is our architect; he'll confer with you on that."

"Fine! And is Miss Drake going to Winter with us?"

"Yes," said the girl.

"That is, Miss Drake is going to Winter at Wolverene," supplemented Bradley.

"You've quite thrilled me, Mr. Thorson, and made me want to stay," she continued. "I can't say I was much smitten with this country at first, but you've made me begin to see it with different eyes. I want to stay and know your beloved Snow Country as you call it."

"You've got to see it with the right eyes to know it," said Gaston earnestly. "If you see it with indoor eyes, counting the discomforts and hardships of it, and all its handicaps you'll see it as something cruel and you'll never learn to care for it. But if you weigh it rightly, its bigness, its freedom, its cleanness, you'll get near to it, and then you'll begin to understand why some people love the Snow Country and wouldn't live anywhere else."

"Yes, yes." Ray Drake had suddenly sensed the growing impatience of his employer and rose sharply. "Another very interesting and poetic outburst coming, I'm sure. Sorry we can't stop to hear it, Ethel?"

She rose at the black look which he gave her. Bradley did likewise, and as Loomis was about to follow he said:

"You needn't come, Loomis, unless you want to. You might stay and give Mr. Thorson the order for that lumber. 'Night, Thorson. See you later."

He had Miss Drake on his arm in an instant, and Gaston, as he watched them leave the building, thought how very young and girlish she looked in Bradley's company. He turned to speak to Loomis and the hunger in that young man's eyes as they followed Ethel smote him silent.

Loomis watched until the door had closed upon his friends then quietly gave Gaston the specifications of the lumber order for the house. This done the pair fell into silence, smoking moodily. Gaston finally spoke, blurting out:

"This is one —— of a place for a girl like that."

"I know it is," agreed Loomis, looking thoughtfully at his cigar. "That's why I came along."

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"Why didn't you—?" Gaston stopped. "No; it's none of my business."

"Go ahead," said Loomis. "What were you going to say?"

"Why is she here?"

For a while Loomis made no reply, devoting his attention entirely to his cigar.

"Pardon me, Loomis," cried Gaston remorsefully. "I had no right to say that to a stranger. And yet you can't feel like a stranger to a man you've fought with."

"It's all right. I understand the spirit you asked it in; I was just trying to tell you why she was here."

He puffed slowly three or four times.

"Ray Drake," said he deliberately, "is one whale of a business man. A real comer."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And he's Ethel's—his sister's guardian."

"A good business man, maybe, but a darn poor guardian," blurted Gaston. "A good guardian would have taken or sent her any place but here."

"It seems so on the face of it, doesn't it? But Ray Drake's too smart a fellow to do anything real bone-head. He sees too far ahead. When he first saw Bradley, at the club in New York, just after we were through school, he said: 'There's the star I'm going to hitch my wagon to.' Well, he did, all right. He was strong with Bradley in a week; had him out to the house to dinner; Ray and Ethel are alone, no family, you know. He got in with the syndicate right after that, and presently Bradley was up here, and he sent for Ray, and—Ray got Ethel to come."

"But why? Great Scott! Drake knows what a mining camp is, 'specially one up North like this, and that girl by her looks never had anything but the best of everything. And ought to have it, too."

"You bet."

"Why, then, did her brother bring her North?"

Loomis smoked calmly.

"Ray Drake is ambitious; it's his religion."

Gaston made no comment.

"Ambitious for himself—and for Ethel."

"Oh."

"Just so."

There was a space of silence.

"And—Miss Drake?"

"You've seen her." Loomis sighed. "As you say, she's used to the best of everything, and ought to have it."

"They haven't got money, then?"

"Not enough; not what they had."

Another silence.

"And how about you," blurted Gaston Olaf. "Haven't you got money enough——?"

"Thorson," laughed Loomis, "I've got eight hundred dollars in the bank, my job with Bradley, and a sense of humor."

"How did you happen to come North?"

"Oh!" Loomis shrugged his shoulders. "I had to come. Understand? She—I just came, that's all."

"I see." Gaston nodded. "And Bradley—what do you know about him?"

"I said I had to come North—when I heard Ethel was going with Ray to where Bradley is."

"Hmm. Bad as that, eh?"

Loomis remained silent.

"Does Drake know about Bradley—what you know?"

"Ray Drake is ambitious. And Bradley, of course is eligible—extremely so. A big man, goes everywhere, much sought after; fond mothers dress their daughters up for him, and so on."

He took up his hat and rose as if disturbed by some thought.

"Guess I'll be going back to the hotel."

Gaston followed him from the room. Out in the street they paused. The white Northern stars were crowded in the heavens above with pin-pricks of light, and the clean spirit of the vast outdoors lay serenely dominant even upon the ragged noisy town. The two stood for a moment before parting.

"Perhaps I've talked too much," said Loomis, throwing away his cigar. "Good night."

"Good night."

Gaston stood looking after him.

"You fool!" he growled, when Loomis was gone. "Why didn't you win her before she came North!"

VI

GASTON had promised to make the Drake order the first cut to go through the mill. Part of the program that Tom and he had mapped out was that they run logs down Wolverene Creek as long as the stream remained open.

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When the ice came it was their plan to begin cutting their timber nearest town, hauling by sleighs to the mill. In this manner they hoped to keep the saws busy a good part of the Winter.

The profit from this Winter sawing was calculated to cover operating expenses, with a small margin left over, so that they would not have to borrow money to tide them over the otherwise unproductive part of the logging season. When the Spring came, bringing the drive down to the booms, with the saws, double from the present equipment, spewing sawdust day and night, the golden harvest would commence, and the success of their project be assured. Until then Gaston Olaf's temperament would give him no rest.

"No rest till we're through the white water and no chance for a jam ahead," he told Tom.

As always he threw himself into the job with all his dynamic energy. He moved between mill and camp restlessly, watching with shrewd eye the mechanics making the saws ready, then driving out to camp to study the crew. As the first rush to the district had been recruited mainly from North Woods lumber-jacks, and as the great majority of them had of course, found nothing but disillusionment and disappointment at the end of their search, good labor was not hard to find.

Gaston had had his pick from a throng of loggers who, unwilling to turn miners at wages, were glad to throw their war-bags into a log bunk-house and feel a saw-handle in their hands. The picking had been done judiciously. The men were mostly young, but here and there an old river-hog, grizzled and seamed, was to be seen.

"It's the young shanty boys who break records when the old fellows begin bragging of the logs they made in the old days," commented Gaston.

Good fortune also had attended them in Sandy MacLean, the bow-legged, stocky Scot who was their foreman. MacLean had logged in many places, and had a knack of handling men with good humor. A dam had been thrown across the spring-bed creek above the logging ground, creating a reservoir which assured a supply of high water whenever a drive was to be sent down-stream.

Crowley, the big trader, had extended credit for provisions and tools to run the camp through the Winter. With these precautions, and with their experience in lumbering, success was an apparent certainty.

"It's just a case of plugging away," summed up Tom Pine one night as they saw the mill building completed and ready for work.

"Yes, and plugging away is the hardest thing in the world for me to do," replied Gaston.

"What! The old wolf's beginning to howl, is he?"

Gaston threw up his head and laughed at the white stars above.

"He still howls!" he cried. "There's no use; music and song and women are too much for me. And there were two of 'em the other night. Gad! What women! As different as a mountain storm and a city breeze, and just about alike after all.

> For a woman is naught but a woman, Tom,
> When you look like a man in her eyes.

"And I'm the boy who can do just that. And the women, all of 'em, look back with the look that shows they understand. That young, sheltered kid from the city looked back the same as the singer; they both understood.

"What did they understand? Heaven knows—and women; men don't. Yessir. But maybe you don't think I had a right to look that way at the young one. I didn't. No more than a timber wolf has to look at a lap dog. That's why I did it. It was too tempting, and I'm strong against everything but temptation.

"There was Bradley sitting, the big, high, mucky-muck, the Skookum Chief showing off the maid he'd elected for his teepee, and feeling safe and sure of her, even if she didn't know she was elected, and there was the girl—and it was too much for me. I could feel Bradley boiling inside when she began to open her eyes when I talked."

"Yes; I saw that, too," said Tom drily. "You did it that trip, Gaston Olaf."

"Did what?"

"Set Bradley against you."

Gaston laughed recklessly.

"I guess I did, all right, Tom. I'm a crazy partner, ain't I?"

Tom made no reply.

"You aren't getting cold feet, Tom?"

"Cold feet nothing! You know me, boy."

"He's sore at me all right. That's only a personal matter, though, and business is business with him. He said he wasn't

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going to bother about the timber game because it wouldn't be good business to interfere with us."

"Yep. That's plain enough. But, only one thing—Bradley isn't going to stand any competition for that girl, Gaston Thorson, and you can lay your estimate on that. If he sees any guy looming up to look like a competitor he'll try his hardest to jam that guy's game, no matter what it is."

"Tom!" laughed Gaston softly. "Don't tempt me."

"Hey? What?"

"When you talk that way you almost make me forget the job we're on. You make me feel like throwing it all up and just bucking Bradley for the fun of the thing."

"Be a fool," growled the old man, "be a fool all you want to, but please don't be a —— fool. You remember when we was in the snow-bank up the valley how we swore we'd drive this job through if we lived to get out? A regular old he-man's job, it is, too. Well, are we going to do it or——"

"We are! By the great pike pole, we are!"

"All right. Then let me tell you something—you keep away from that girl!"

"Miss Drake?"

"Yes. 'Cause if you don't Bradley'll go after us. Take my word for that, boy; he will. And he's so big around here that he'll make more trouble than we can handle and do the job."

Gaston nodded.

"You've got it sized up about right, Tom. Well, I'll promise not to go out looking for trouble. I'll stick to the job. We'll keep quiet and make lumber."

GASTON planned to make a first small drive at the end of two weeks' cutting, but one morning at the end of seven days as he and Sandy MacLean viewed the logs that were choking the creek near the camp it was apparent that sufficient footage was down to justify a beginning.

"There's hundreds of thousands laying there, boss," said the Scot, "and people in town crying for lumber at any price. It ain't logging to run a drive this time o' the year, but it's a shame not to turn yon logs into ready cash."

"You're right, Sandy," agreed Gaston. "How's the water up in the dam?"

"Full to the banks and trickling over the sluice-gate."

"All right. You've got some man you can depend upon to open the sluices?"

"Sure. As good as I could do it myself."

"All right. Send him up to give us some water. Get your drive-gang together. You take it down yourself, Sandy. I want it to get to the mill without a hitch."

The drive-crew—"the river-pigs"—came swaggering with cant-hooks, peavies, and spiked boots as the current of the river, supplemented by the water released from the dam, began to take on a deeper note. Though there was no visible rise of the water the logs began to stir uneasily, pushing more closely together, pressing more insistently against the booms that stretched across the stream.

"She's coming," said MacLean, shrewdly watching the water. "Ready at those boom-chains, boys. Knock 'em free the minute the head hits us."

A white comb of water came hissing gently down-stream, setting the current to racing and eddying far ahead of it.

"Here she is." The comb struck the uppermost logs. "Let 'er go!"

The boom chains clattered as the men knocked them free. For an instant the drive trembled and hung stationary. Then, lifting on the rising water, it moved forward with a lurch and floated serenely, irresistibly down-stream.

Gaston waited until the tail of the drive had disappeared behind the nearest bend and drove off for the mill. There he found all ready for the first sawing. Tom Pine had tested saws, log-carriages, belts, and engines, and now was awaiting the coming of the first logs to start the saw-dust flying.

"How was the water?" was his first question.

"Fine. We got a head that lifted her up and sucked her down-stream like a bunch of chips."

"Then we'll begin making lumber tomorrow," said Tom. "And we'll keep on making it, and saying nothing to anybody, until the job's done."

"Right," said Gaston, busying himself with a final inspection of the mill.

"Oh, I forgot. There was somebody out to see the mill today, boy."

"Yes?"

"Yes. She was disappointed because you weren't here."

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Gaston made no reply.

"Miss Adair, it was," said Tom.

"I didn't ask who it was," retorted Gaston and dropped down into the sawdust pit without another word.

Instead of logs there came down the river next morning a panting river-man.

"A doctor and some dynamite," he gasped. "The doctor's for Sandy MacLean's foot and the dynamite to spring the jam out of the rapids."

Tom Pine swore and jumped on his cap, but Gaston turned to a sawdust boy.

"Take my rig, drive to town, and bring a doctor back here on the jump!"

When the lad had started he turned to the messenger.

"How bad is Sandy hurt?"

"It's his foot," replied the man. "He slipped on a skinned log and got pinched before he could come up. It was in the white water at the head of the rapids, and the logs were holding him with his head just out of water. He sez he'd fire ever' mother's son of us when he saw us running toward him, but it was too close to monkey with—he'd 'a' been ground up in a few minutes.

"So we told him to fire ahead; and it took the whole crew to spread those logs far enough to pull him out. Oh, I guess there's only a few bones broke in his foot, and he's out of his head a little, too. And while we were carrying him to shore that —— little two-by-four drive went and jammed herself so tight that it's holding the water behind it."

"Where did all this happen?"

"Up at those —— rapids in the high-bank narrows, 'bout two mile upstream ——! We ain't river-pigs, boss, we're a bunch of high-bankers letting her get hung up like that on us."

"You had hard luck; jams will happen."

"You say she'll need dynamiting?" interjected Tom Pine.

"You bet. She's too tight to be picked to pieces. Sandy says so hisself when he ain't raving."

"Dynamite's all out in this camp at present. Won't be any to be had until day after tomorrow."

"Then she'll stay there till day after——"

"Will she?" interrupted Gaston quietly. "Not if I know it. Our program says we start making lumber today, and that program's going through, jam or no jam."

When the rig returned with the doctor Gaston leaped in and drove without mercy for the scene of disaster. He bent over the injured foreman before even looking at the jammed drive.

"Hard luck, old hoss," he said. "Did you get it bad?"

"Gimme my walking papers, boss," muttered the Scot dazedly. "I ain't fit to go near white-water again."

"Nonsense! Cheer up; we all get it if we run the river long enough."

"To get caught in a boy's drive like that!" MacLean groaned and cursed his clumsiness eloquently. "And then the boys had to let her run wild though I threatened to beat the head off every last one of 'em; so there she is boss, sewed up tighter'n a beaver dam. And I'm going to burn my calked shoes and hunt me a job as a cookee."

The doctor had been working at his injured foot in the meanwhile.

"You're lucky, MacLean," said the man of medicine finally. "For a wonder the ankle isn't broken. A couple of toes will have to come off and there's a couple little bones in the foot that will take some healing, but you'll come out fit to try it again."

"Good!" cried Gaston, in relief. "And now we'll have a look at the drive."

The drive had formed in the most difficult and treacherous sort of river water, a rapids lying where the stream narrowed and grew swift between high steep banks. Here on a tangle of fang-like rocks, the logs had rushed in the fatal moment that the men had run to the rescue of their foreman, and a moment had been enough. Three logs, up-ended by the powerful current had caught in the rocks in the middle of the stream in the shape of a huge, crude tripod.

Upon this tangle the drive had hurled itself, lacing and interlacing its logs in a hundred grotesque patterns, until now it lay stretched across the stream in the shape of a rough crescent, curving from bank to bank, so tightly woven together that behind it the water was rising as behind a dam. Gaston walked warily out upon the tangle stopping here and there to drive his peavy into a log and test the solidity of the mass.

"There's no give to it," he commented when he had crossed from bank to bank, "but every jam has its weak point."

He clambered down the face of the jam until he had located the tangled trio of logs which were responsible for the trouble.

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The growing pressure of water had by this time loosened the two topmost logs and Gaston saw to his astonishment that the whole jam was resting on one log. One of the men with him, a wiry French Canadian saw the changed situation at the same instant and ran swiftly to shore for an ax.

"Hi see heem, M'sieu!" he cried. "By gar! Hi chop hout dat small log, M'sieu, and, voila! she's come down lak——"

"You're a married man, aren't you?" said Gaston, barring the way.

The man nodded.

"Give me the ax."

"Eh, M'sieu? What——"

"Give me the ax. Now hike back and get a peavy and wait. Boys," he continued to the men, "she's going to be busted. All hands get ready to keep her moving when she starts."

He hurled his cap and mackinaw to the shore and ran swiftly out to the center log and began to chop. The double-bitted, razor-edged ax was a plaything in his hands, moving so rapidly that it seemed to flash continually in the morning sun, while the great chips flew all about him. As his ax neared the heart of the log he felt it tremble. At the next blow it bent ever so slightly. Gaston stopped chopping.

"Better come back, boss," called some one drily. "She'll wear down in time now."

"Haven't got time to wait."

Gaston looked toward either shore, but the curving horns of the log wall would cut off escape in either direction. Then he looked up the face of the jam above him, and having made his decision tapped carefully upon the gash in the key-log. The log creaked and the mass behind it trembled.

"Take a run, boss; she's busting!"

Gaston smiled. He took a long breath, swung the ax widely above his head, and with the weight of his body behind it, drove it home. The effect was as if he had struck into a pile of dynamite. The thud of the ax, the crack of the key-log, the sudden roar as the great mass tipped forward, all seemed to come simultaneously. Then above it all the voice of Gaston Olaf:

"Up on top of it, boys! Keep it moving!"

The astounded men looked for him first in the welter of tumbling logs and spouting water. He was not there. Then they saw him. As he had struck the final blow he had leaped up the face of the jam, reaching the top ere the falling logs could strike him and hurl him back into the water. There was a roar from the men when they saw their leader triumphantly riding the top logs of the falling jam.

Then they threw themselves out upon the tangle as upon a living foe, for the moment as daring as Gaston. They fought as he fought, wildly, unthinkingly, hurling themselves into places of danger, tearing the logs loose the minute they threatened to lodge, fighting, roaring, cursing, until the troublesome rapids were clear and the jam had become a drive once more.

"Dynamite!" laughed a river-man. "Well I should say so. Hyoo-man dynamite, that's what that guy is, and over eighty proof."

A cheer greeted Gaston as he came panting and dripping to shore and for the first time he became conscious that his exploit had had many witnesses. The boy who had driven to town for a doctor had been nothing loath to spread the news of the jam, and many had hurried out to view the sight. Ethel Drake was there in the crowd, and as Gaston stopped at the sight of the gathering, she stood up in the rig beside Bradley and clapped her hands.

"Splendid, splendid!" she called.

Gaston looked from her to Bradley without responding in any way to her words. The mining man's face was pale and as hard as stone. His great, long jaw was thrust out and despite the smile he attempted to assume his eyes were cold with hatred.

"And it was just play for him!"

Gaston knew that warm voice ere he turned and saw the speaker. Ada Adair was lounging negligently against a silver birch and she nodded and smiled nonchalantly as Gaston's eyes met hers. He did not speak a word. He picked up his cap and mackinaw and sprang back upon the moving logs and went out of sight down the river.

TO BE CONTINUED

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The GRANDSON of BLACK GEORGE

The DRAMATIC LIFE STORY of KING PETER of SERBIA

BY

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "The Sinews of War," "Contraband Matrimony," etc.

THERE is one epic figure in this war's gigantic saturnalia, a king who stands forth in the long roll of kings — Peter Karageorgevitch, titular ruler of Serbia, grandson of Black George, founder of his house and breaker of the prison-chains that bound Serbia to the Moslem power.

There is nothing modern about King Peter's story, save, perhaps, the aggressive democracy of his character. He is essentially a man of the people, a student, a socialist, with the strong, red blood of the earth-born coursing his veins. He has never forgotten his peasant ancestry. Indeed, he is proud of it. But by fate's whim the story of his life, bridging a wide span of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reads like a chanson by some medieval troubadour. It is no more of our day than the story of his native land, dark, turgid, fraught with intrigue and bloodshed, dynastic feud and assassination, yet flashing out in frequent glowing pages the virile efforts of an untaught people.

No story-book king ever passed through more adventures and vicissitudes than King Peter. Born in a palace, he knew exile as a lad; he saw the fortunes of his family wrecked, apparently beyond repair; he became a soldier for a foreign land, knew all the perils of campaigning, capture and escape; in mature age he tasted the bitter portion of a monarch who can not reign; and at the far end of his life he was precipitated by a deed which he abhorred upon his father's throne, to reign gloriously and with honor, in the face of an adversity greater than any which had marked his half-century of exile.

He saw Serbia rise, through the efforts of his own and of the rival dynasty, the Obrenovitch, from an insignificant, semi-independent principality, owing fealty to the Sultan, to the most powerful country in the Balkans. He achieved remarkable political and social reforms, stamped out anarchy in a land where even the king had bowed before the military clique, and removed the seat of government from the Russian and Austrian legations to the Konak at Belgrade. He fought two successful wars, by means of which Serbia's area and population were increased fifty per cent. and at seventy he was not afraid to take his part in the last and greatest struggle of all, leading his soldiers in victory and defeat.

In order to grasp the salient features of King Peter's life, it is necessary to recall briefly that the history of Serbia this past hundred years has been the history of the conflict of the two contending dynasties,

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the Karageorgevitch and the Obrenovitch. George Petrovitch, better known as Black or Kara George, a peasant of Vichevatz, became famous toward the end of the eighteenth century as a *heiduck* or leader of outlaw bands against the Turks.

Finally, he worked up a genuine revolutionary movement, and in 1804 was proclaimed *Gospodar* of Serbia. He achieved a measure of independence, but in 1817 was assassinated by an agent of Milosh Techovitch, a pig merchant of Dobrina, who in later life took the surname of Obrenovitch. Milosh was elected Prince of Serbia a few months after the death of Black George, and so the Obrenovitch dynasty was born in blood as it was to perish in blood.

It would be fruitless to survey in detail the line of Serbian princes and kings, who ruled from the accession of the first of the Obrenovitch to that dreadful night of June 10, 1903, when the dead bodies of Alexander II. Obrenovitch and his queen, Draga, were thrown through the windows of their dressing-room in the Old Konak by the group of army officers known as "The Eighty-three," and the heel of death stamped out the last legitimate scion of Milosh, the one-time pig merchant.

An idea of the Serbian history of this period may be gained from the bare statement that in a little more than a hundred years Serbia had ten reigns, in the course of which eight individuals occupied the throne, two of the Obrenovitch having reigned twice, with intervening abdications. There have been three Karageorgevitch rulers, and five of the Obrenovitch. One of the Karageorgevitch was assassinated and two of the Obrenovitch. Four reigns of the ten were upset by revolutions, and three rulers abdicated to save their lives.

A sinister record, in all truth. But bear in mind the fact that this people dwelt under the blight of Moslem repression and savagery until 1804, a blight which was not lifted entirely for several decades afterward. Bear in mind, too, that the internal affairs of Serbia have been the football of the diplomats of Russia and Austria. The agents of St. Petersburg espoused the cause of the Karageorgevitch; the Obrenovitch looked for support to Vienna.

For generations no Cabinet could sit in office unless it played the game of the great power that was in the ascendant at the palace. There was no hereditary nobility to hold the reins in check. The ruling class were men of the peasantry, who had thrust themselves forward by sheer personal ability, crude, passionate, headstrong and unschooled to the responsibilities imposed upon them. The wonder is that Serbia's first hundred years present so few bloody and unsettled pages.

Into this atmosphere of political unrest, Peter Karageorgevitch was born in the Konak at Belgrade, July 12, 1844 (or June 29, according to the Greek calendar), while his father, Alexander I. Karageorgevitch, was Prince of Serbia. In 1858 Austrian intrigue forced the abdication of Prince Alexander, and Peter, a boy of fourteen, had his first experience of exile. The fallen ruler fled across the Danube to Hungary but so bitter was the Austrian feeling against him that he was forbidden to reside in Austria and Hungary. Young Peter was taken to Paris, that haven of kings in exile during the tumultuous years of the middle period of the nineteenth century in Europe, and entered the Military College of St. Cyr, where he was graduated in 1864.

For the next six years he led the wandering, dissatisfied career of a young man whose destiny of leadership is denied to him. The only outlet for his energies was participation in the conspiracies which his father's adherents were directing against the Obrenovitch who sat in Belgrade. Old Milosh had died in 1860, and his son Michael, who succeeded him, was a brave, high-spirited prince, popular with the people and braced by strong Austrian support.

Plot after plot was launched by the Karageorgevitch, always without success. Finally, in desperation, a band of discontented conspirators lay in wait for Michael as he walked in the Park of Topchida and assassinated him on June 10, 1868, just thirty-five years to a day before assassination at last won the crown for the Karageorgevitch.

But Michael's death served to strengthen the hold the Obrenovitch had won upon the affections of their subjects. Milan, grandson of a younger brother of old Milosh, was proclaimed Prince in Michael's stead, and the Karageorgevitch were left with only the stigma of a crime to show for their fruitless exploit.

What part Peter's father had in Michael's assassination cannot definitely be determined. Alexander Karageorgevitch always

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denied that he had even knowledge of the Topchida plot. But be this true or otherwise, it is beyond question that Peter was then too young to have been entrusted with the details of such an undertaking. He often said afterward that his heart turned sick within him at the news of what his father's followers had done.

THE Franco-Prussian War came as a vast relief to Peter; it furnished an opportunity to demonstrate the worth of the wild, impetuous Karageorgevitch blood and carried him out of the unhealthy atmosphere of café conspiracies into which he might have sunk, for lack of something else to occupy his time.

He enlisted under an assumed name as a private in the Foreign Legion, and was assigned to the Army of the East, under d'Aurelle de Paladins, in time to participate in the mournful battles of the second phase of France's tragedy, a tragedy so similar to that which was to overtake his own beloved land. Before he had been very long in the service, Peter was recognized by some of his old schoolmates at St. Cyr, and he was promoted to lieutenant for distinguished conduct in a fight at the Aubrais station near Orleans.

But that peculiar fate which dogged his footsteps throughout his life, sinking him deep in the mire of misfortune after each taste of good luck, was in wait for him again. In the course of an affair of outposts beyond the Loire, he was captured by a troop of Bavarian Uhlans, and but for his presence of mind would have spent the rest of the war a prisoner in Germany. He carried around his waist a belt containing three thousand francs in gold, and he made no effort to conceal it from his captors.

They soon became involved in a dispute over the partition of the prize, and in the midst of the confusion Peter stole away and when he was discovered leaped into the rapidly flowing river. The Uhlans fired at him all the way across, without result, but the chill cold of the mountain waters brought down upon him an attack of rheumatism, which afterwards remained chronic and was the principal cross he had to bear in the campaigns of his old age.

Prince Kara, as he was known to his comrades, lived a charmed life in those eventful months of 1871. He went through battle after battle, always in the thick of it, and was never hit, although a young nephew, Nicolaievitch, was killed at his side. Of the twenty-five officers of his battalion, five were killed, eight wounded and six taken prisoner. He served through the cycle of battles around Orleans with d'Aurelle de Paladins, when it seemed almost as though the French might retrieve the blunders of the Sedan campaign and relieve Paris.

When this hope was frustrated, Peter joined Bourbaki's army and fought with it at Le Mans. He was decorated with the Legion of Honor for bravery on the fatal battle-field of Villarsexal, and remained with the rearguard that covered the flight of the remnants of Bourbaki's scattered divisions across the frontier into Switzerland, the only way of escape open to them from the enveloping armies of Prince Frederick Charles. That ended Prince Kara's military life for the time being. He was interned with the other French troops until the Peace of Versailles.

Release from pleasant captivity in Switzerland brought with it enforced return to the life of aimless drifting that Peter found so exasperating. He was not of the type of royal adventurer who seeks his recreation in the paths of dissipation. Peter was a good deal of a student, a scholar, a dabbler in philosophy. His interests lay with those who appreciated academic ways. He wandered, but always he studied. If he visited a town, he sought out the local university, if there was one, or if such means of diversion were wanting, he talked to the people and examined their system of local government.

Peter's next opportunity came to him when the Serbs of Bosnia and the Herzegovina revolted against Turkey in 1878, encouraged by the Russian and Montenegrin campaigns against the Sultan's troops. Peter managed to smuggle himself through Austria and across the frontier into the Herzegovina, under the name of Peter Mrkenyich. His explanation for the *nomme de guerre* was that he did not wish his enemies to seize advantage of his presence with the revolutionists to charge that he was inspired only by a desire to make capital for the Karageorgevitch.

"Always," he said afterward, "my thought has been of the Serbs—more of the Serbs than of Serbia. What do we, the Karageorgevitch, matter? What did the Obrenovitch matter? No, I tell you what

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matters is the Serbian people, their freedom, their greatness."

Peter played a prominent part in the fierce mountain warfare of the revolution, and it was soon whispered through the army that Peter Mrkenyich was really Peter Karageorgevitch, grandson of Black George, the great hero of the Serbian people. Peter taught the revolutionary officers the lessons he, himself, had learned at St. Cyr and in the battles about Orleans and in the northeast. The blood of his *heiduck* grandfather made him appreciative of the value of their guerrilla tactics. He met with victory.

The revolutionists, driving south, and the Montenegrins, under their Prince, Nicholas, driving north, ultimately met and joined forces. Peter and Nicholas soon struck up a friendship. Nicholas, son of that proud race, the Petrovich Niegoch, who have ruled in Montenegro since the Middle Ages, found a kindred spirit in the hawk-nosed grandson of Karageorge. When the war ended, and the Serbs of Bosnia and the Herzegovina were taken under the protection of Austria, Nicholas inisted upon carrying Peter back with him to his little mountain capital, Cettinje.

Here, in a valley high up on the slopes of the Black Mountain, Peter was introduced to the handsome daughters of the Montenegrin court. As was only to be expected from his romantic life, he fell in love with one of them, the Princess Zorka Lioubitza. But he had a hard time convincing Nicholas that an old campaign-comrade was necessarily an ideal son-in-law. Nicholas was a practical person. He had made up his mind to use his crop of really stunning daughters to build up good connections with powerful European courts.

Peter's one chance was that there were many daughters — and not so many eligible young princelings in Europe; and in the end Nicholas suffered himself to be persuaded. After all, he reasoned, Peter might be only the son of a pretender, but some day he would be pretender himself, and unless all signs failed there might come another day when the ruler of Montenegro would find it to his advantage to have a son-in-law who owned a claim upon the Serbian crown. He was a wise, far-seeing old fellow, was Nicholas.

Peter and the Princess Zorka were married at Cettinje on July 30, 1883, but we can not dismiss them now, with the concluding phrase of the fairy-books, "and they lived happily ever afterward." They lived happily, but death parted them in a very few years. Peter had no particular home to take his princess to; his father was a wanderer, like himself. Moreover, Nicholas preferred to have them stay at Cettinje. Nicholas liked to have some one at hand with whom he might discuss military questions and Balkan politics and who was too dependent upon him to dare to argue any more than was pleasant.

FOR seven years, then, or until his princess died in 1890, Peter lived the narrow, humdrum life of the Montenegrin court, shut off from the great world he knew so well through his travels and adventures, and restricted for entertainment to the resources of Cettinje, a village of five thousand inhabitants.

Once in 1885, when his father died and he succeeded to the claim upon the Serbian throne, he drifted back into the world for a brief space. But this outing was soon ended and he returned to a routine composed of billiards with his dictatorial father-in-law; drilling a handful of troops now and then; riding on the wretched mountain roads; and, for genuine diversion, an occasional skirmish on the frontiers with raiding Albanian tribesmen.

With it all, Peter was happy after a fashion. He had an attentive wife, who had been brought up in the strict régime of the Montenegrin royal family, and three children came to them, the Princess Helene and the Princes George and Alexander. But the death of the Princess Zorka severed his ties with Montenegro. Moreover, he was now independent in means, as he had succeeded to his father's comfortable fortune and to the subvention which the Russian Government granted to the Karageorgevitch pretender.

In 1891, he removed with his children to Geneva, where, for twelve years, he lived a life of obscurity, devoted to the education of his family and to personal studies. Here, for instance, he accomplished the undertaking of which he, himself, is most proud— the translation of John Stuart Mill into Serbian.

This phase of Peter's life is alike the most interesting and the least known. It was during these years that his character took on its definite shape, while he was grounding him-

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self in those principles of government, which he was to demonstrate so strikingly when his great opportunity came to him. In Europe he had been forgotten, although the Austrian and Russian diplomats remembered him somewhat, and the secret police of various powers, great and small, maintained a watch upon his goings and comings. But they had their efforts for their pains.

Peter made no move toward regaining the crown which his father had lost. Serbia seethed with unrest against the reactionary policies of its Obrenovitch ruler, but Peter went on, undisturbed, with his studies of political and social problems. His small circle of callers was composed almost entirely of scholars and distinguished German and French socialist leaders. In Geneva people spoke of him as "Red Peter" or the "Red Prince," because of his well-known socialistic inclinations. He lived in a small villa, like any retired business man, of moderate wealth.

Toward the end of his stay in Geneva he was generally alone, for his two sons and his daughter were at school in St. Petersburg. Sometimes he went away on brief visits to a Monsieur or Herr Professor in some quiet French or German university town. Rarely he visited St. Petersburg, where he was always kindly received, for Russia appreciated, even more than Peter, himself, the possibility that at some not distant day the Karageorgevitch might be recalled to Serbia.

Without any intriguing on Peter's part, events were shaping themselves definitely along certain lines in Belgrade during the opening years of the twentieth century. Here, in this dingy little Balkan city on the Danube, was being enacted a tragedy as sordidly picturesque as could be found in the chronicles of the courts of the Valois.

Alexander II. Obrenovitch was king, having succeeded his father, that Milan, who had succeeded the assassinated Prince Michael in 1868. Milan's misconduct had forced him to abdicate in Alexander's favor, but instead of profiting by his father's mistakes, the son actually endeavored to outdo him.

His first exploit was the arrest of his regents and ministers when he was seventeen and the declaration of his majority at that early age. His culminating exploit was to marry one of his mother's ladies-in-waiting, a handsome widow named Draga Maschin, who had been a swineherd in her youth and therefore was eminently fitted to be the queen of the great-grandnephew of a pig-merchant.

This woman, Draga Maschin, was said to be a secret emissary of the Austrians at the Serbian court and when she became queen she used all her influence to bend Alexander to the motives she had at heart. Also, she made the mistake of seeking preferment for her own relatives and endeavoring to secure for them important places in the army.

The idea underlying all her efforts it is generally asserted was to establish herself and the Austrian interest so powerfully in Serbia that their enemies would not be able to move against them. Of course, as a matter of fact, Queen Draga, King Alexander and their opponents, a group of army officers, known as The Eighty-three, were merely pawns in the giant game that was being played between Vienna and St. Petersburg for dominance in the Balkans.

The real protagonists were the notorious Russian agent Hartwig, afterward Minister at Belgrade, and Dr. Konstantin Dumba, the Austrian Minister, who afterward became Ambassador to the United States and was recalled by his Government in 1915 at the request of President Wilson.

The officers of The Eighty-three were not even known as Karageorgevitch supporters. They were led by a Colonel Maschin, a brother-in-law of Queen Draga, who hated her for various reasons discreditable to both of them. The one idea of The Eighty-three was hatred of their degenerate ruler and his wife, whom they knew to be an Austrian spy. Back in their brains somewhere there may have been a spark of patriotic dread, lest Draga succeed in her sinister intent to honeycomb the Serbian army with officers in Austria's pay; but first and foremost they were wroth at having been passed over in favor of her creatures. That is the sober truth.

The revolt against Alexander and Draga was a military *coup d'état*, inspired by Hartwig, because Draga was becoming too dangerous in her work of subverting Serbia to Austria. It is only fair to say that Peter was never connected in any way with The Eighty-three, and that the honors which he was compelled to bestow on some

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of their leaders were no more than the price of his own safety. For these monsters held absolute authority in Serbia for several years after Peter's succession. When he was strong enough to dispense with them, he did so, and the whole course of his reign was in direct antithesis to what might have been expected from a king who would soil himself with such a dastardly undertaking.

THE difficulties that beset Peter after his coronation are almost incomprehensible to a Western people. The singularly atrocious character of the assassination of the late rulers alienated the affections of a large proportion of the Serbians, who otherwise would have welcomed the end of Obrenovitch tyranny. Austria poured money into the country in an effort to hinder the growing Russian influence at court. At every point King Peter found his efforts thwarted, sometimes by open enemies, sometimes by the very men who had seated him upon his throne.

He was handicapped especially by the vicious tendencies of his eldest son, the Crown Prince George, whose dissipated life inspired a fear that the court of Belgrade might become again what Alexander and Draga had made it. One may judge of the strength of the hostile elements that worked against him by an incident which occurred before the whole official world of the capital in the cathedral on Palm Sunday, 1908.

A military chaplain who preached the sermon that day belonged to the Obrenovitch party, and he seized the opportunity to denounce the means by which King Peter had been placed upon the throne. The service was in celebration of the rising under Milosh Obrenovitch against the Turkish garrison of Belgrade on Palm Sunday, 1808, and in the course of his sermon the preacher pointed to the tomb of Prince Michael Obrenovitch, who was assassinated by members of the Karageorgevitch party in 1868.

"There lies a ruler," he cried, "who, without shedding a drop of blood, gave back to Serbia her inheritance, and in return fell by the hand of a hired assassin! Shame on the miscreant who compassed the death of this patriot prince! Honor to the Obrenovitch, oh, ye people! Honor to them!"

And the aisles of the cathedral reechoed to the response:

"Honor to the Obrenovitch! Honor to them!"

Through it all King Peter sat in his pew, white-faced and stern, unable to resent the insult, even had he wished to do so.

Indeed, one of the things to his credit is the fact that he passed over as petty and unworthy of retaliation such personal slights as this. He clung without deviation to his program of winning the regard of his people by deeds, not words. And in the light of his constructive accomplishments of those years, it is easy today to understand why Geneva had called him the "Red Prince."

In the first place, he abolished the Senate, a body controlled by the Throne and designed by the Obrenovitch as a curb on popular government, as expressed in the Lower House or Shkupshtina. He restored constitutional rule, and undertook a program of social legislation, which did much to benefit the condition of the vast mass of the rural peasant population.

But his most notable achievement, and conversely, the one which required the most time, was the gradual curtailment of the undue influence which had been obtained by a small group of army officers. He was materially assisted in this policy by the fortuitous death of Colonel Maschin, the head and fore-front of the military cabal and one of the most dangerous, as he was also one of the most evil, men in the hotbed of intrigue that is the Balkans.

Best of all, while he favored the Panslav movement and leaned toward a natural friendship with Russia, rather than an unnatural alliance with Austria—all of whose policies and aims were contrary to the interests of the Slav race—he established the principle of Serbia's absolute freedom from outside control. The Russian and Austrian ministers might bribe and conspire, but under his rule their authority did not run far beyond the legation grounds. This was particularly true of Austria. Russia, naturally, did not have many occasions for exerting secret pressure.

In every way he furnished a striking contrast to the Obrenovitch princes who had preceded him. Peter is—or was, before age and suffering crippled his physique—a lean, upstanding man, with the dark, sharp-featured, intelligent face of his family, kingly in comportment, yet singularly unassuming. He talks unaffectedly and

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directly, and holds, to a remarkable degree, the Balkan peasant's peculiar love for the soil that nourishes him.

He is awake to all vital problems, intensely interested in modern developments in farming and agriculture, and broad-minded beyond most of his fellow-rulers in Europe. The Obrenovitch were stout, swarthy, round-headed men, with heavy Ottoman noses and thick lips. They were generally weak, stubborn and insincere. Peter is a man of his word, and has the keen insight of the born soldier.

In 1909, it became necessary to deprive the Crown Prince George of his rights to the succession, and this step did much to create confidence in the new dynasty, as Prince Alexander, the king's second son, who became crown prince, is a young man of studious, earnest disposition. King Peter and the new crown prince clinched the affections of their people by their conduct in the two Balkan wars.

The king, who was then nearly seventy years old, did not take the field in person, but Prince Alexander commanded the First Army and earned high rewards for his share in the victory of Kumanovo, which broke the Turkish power in Central Macedonia. In the second Balkan war the prince held high command at the decisive battle of Guevgheli.

One outcome of the Balkan wars was the creation of a remarkable propaganda of Pan-Serbism, coupled with a restless ambition to sweep under the wings of the Serbian eagle the millions of adjacent Serbians dwelling in Austrian and Hungarian territory. This spirit was not a dynastic or even a Governmental policy. It was the spontaneous development of race feeling, stimulated by conquest. Austria, not unnaturally, viewed the birth of such a propaganda with alarm, which turned to panic with the assassination of the heir apparent to the dual throne at Sarajevo, in Bosnia, in June, 1914, by a Bosnian Serb. What followed is a part of the history of the Great War.

KING PETER was ill at the time the crisis came in the last week of July, 1914. The rheumatism, which had been planted in his bones by the chill water of the Loire that day he broke from his Bavarian captors forty-three years before, complicated by other ailments brought on by the burden and responsibilities of his work, had made of him a semi-invalid.

Already, in the past year he had been obliged several times for brief periods to appoint Prince Alexander as regent in his stead. But he rallied to meet the emergency, as he had rallied to meet every emergency in his long life. He and his ministers used every device they could think of to avert war. They offered everything to Austria, except the concession of their independence which Austria demanded. Everything they offered was rejected.

"Very well, then," said Peter, "we will have war."

All Europe went to arms, and in the clash and turmoil of millions of men, the world forgot for a time the little country which was the cause of it all. Then, in the midst of Allied defeats came word of a great Serbian victory over the Austrians, a whole Austrian army destroyed. The Allied rulers sent King Peter congratulatory telegrams, and the rest of Europe went back to its grim work and forgot the Serbians again.

Another interval passed, and a second time the Allied capitals were electrified by word that an Austrian army had perished on the marches of Serbia. And again Europe forgot. But Austria did not. Driven desperate by the humiliation of two defeats at the hands of a nation not one-tenth her size, the dual monarchy strained every nerve for a third trial. An overpowering army swept across the frontier. The Serbians were forced back; Belgrade was taken; everything seemed lost.

Then a dramatic thing happened. Old King Peter had himself carried in a stretcher to Lazeravatz in the center of the Serbian position, where the troops of the famous Second Regiment, "The Iron Regiment," that had never known defeat, stood in the last trenches. Feebly he rose from the stretcher, exchanged his stick for a rifle and walked out to the firing-line.

"My children," he said to the soldiers, "I know you are very tired. You have fought like heroes. But our country is in danger. He who can resist no longer may go home again without fear of being punished. But the country is in danger, and I have come here to die with those of you who care to remain. Who will die with his king for Serbia?"

And he fired his rifle across the parapet.

With a hoarse cheer, the Serbians went

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over the parapet. The Second Regiment was followed by the rest of the line. The Austrian center was broken. The wings were separated and hemmed in narrow mountain passes. Practically all the Austrian artillery was lost; tens of thousands of prisoners were taken; and the battered invading army retreated across the Danube and the Save with less than two-thirds of its original strength.

In twelve days there was not an Austrian in arms on Serbian soil, and delirious with victory, the Serbs marched behind their king through the streets of Belgrade and up to the doors of the cathedral. There was a halt here, while some one went to look for the key, and then they streamed in, dirty, unkempt infantrymen, who had fought steadily for two weeks, and because there was no priest, King Peter, himself, celebrated the thanksgiving service.

A fitting climax for the old warrior-king's life, was it not? But fate decided differently. Once again Peter was to be the victim of that weird adversity which preyed upon the heels of triumph all through his carrer. Austria gave in, beaten and sullen. She had no more spirit for fighting the Serbs. But it was otherwise with her great ally, Germany. Germany needed a safe corridor through the Balkans into Asia. Bulgaria was ready and waiting to help form such a corridor, but Serbia stood in the way. So Mackensen was sent to the Danube, and with Mackensen the pick of the German infantry and heavy artillery.

Worn out by three exhausting battles of gigantic dimensions, each one of which made Gettysburg seem like an affair of outposts, what could Serbia do? The Germans and Austrians attacked from the north and west; the Bulgars and the Turks drove in from the east. Her own allies had forgotten her again, after sending congratulations on her third victory. They awoke from their fool's dream too late to be of help. Serbia was doomed.

Yet Peter still refused to give in. He sent to Voivode Putnik, the Serb commander-in-chief, and asked permission to visit the eastern front, where a thin line of Serbian troops strove to keep the Bulgars back. But Putnik refused.

"Very well," replied the king. "It is in your power to refuse to permit an old soldier to visit the front. But I am still the king. Perhaps the king can still be of some help to his soldiers. Give me two gendarmes."

With his two gendarmes he reached the first-line trenches on the east front. He hobbled out to the firing-line, and for two hours he stood beside his soldiers and fired and loaded with them. But he saw it was useless. The masses of the Bulgarians covered the hills. The Serbian artillery was short of ammunition. He could not again turn defeat into victory by the mere strength of his personality. The troops about him were the gaunt specters of men. They were willing to stand and die. But they knew too well the odds against them.

The retreat through Albania was decided upon by the Serbian generals as the only way to avoid capture. Over wild and barren mountains, roadless and unknown, where even the eagle starved, the wreck of Serbia's manhood toiled its way, at the head, leaning on his staff, the dauntless figure of the old king. So he passed into exile, behind him the ruins of the structure he had reared in the face of undescribable obstacles, ahead of him—what?

Yet after it all, half-blinded, crippled in limb, buffeted as few men of any rank have been, he could say, in a message of thanks to the American people, who had aided his land in its distress:

"I am still king. I come from the people, but an heroic people, who prefer bitter death to comfortable, shameful slavery. My grandfather was a peasant, and I am prouder of that than of my throne. Crowns are lost, but the pure, clean blood of those who have lived of the earth does not die out."

He fell silent, bowed down in his chair. But in a moment his tired eyes glowed with undying faith, and he cried—

"I believe in the liberty of Serbia as I believe in God. It was the dream of my youth. It was for that I fought throughout my manhood. It has become the faith of the twilight of my life. I live only to see Serbia free. I pray God to let me live until the day of the redemption of my people. That day I am ready to die if the Lord wills. I have struggled a great deal in my life, and I am tired, bruised and broken from it. But I am gathering my strength to march once more at the head of my men. I will see, I shall see, their triumphs! I shall not die before the victory of my Fatherland!"

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Muchacho of Tumbling Water

BY ROBERT J. PEARSALL

Author of "Anting-Anting," "Koshinga," etc.

TOWNS are variously christened; Aguacaer was named after the nature of its river. A rushing, roaring, angry stream it is indeed at this point, and especially so immediately after the rainy season. Taken as a whole, it cuts across Mindanao from Baybigan to the sea, and roughly divides the Tagalog country from the land of the Mohammedan Malanaos.

Aguacaer, although a village of Tagalogs, was for a long time under Malanao rule. That is, the Malanaos enslaved such of its people as they chose, taxed the others all their surplus, and in general used the Tagalogs to their own advantage. Then the Americans freed the town. It must be confessed the inhabitants at first interpreted this freedom as being but a change from brown masters to white.

But after a few years they began to realize that behind the stern strength of the white man there lay some great purpose, which they dimly felt to be good. And, in a stumbling way, they began to play up to that purpose.

The town was entirely rebuilt, with wide, clean streets and enlarged and partitioned bamboo houses; the gleaming fields of rice and *camotes* stretched away to the north for miles; the *tuba* men sought other occupations and the ways of the people became brisker and their eyes brighter. There was promise in Aguacaer. Most of all, I think, there was promise in the faces of her school children.

But one day the American garrison stationed there was reduced by nine-tenths of its strength. Within a week thereafter hunters to the south began to bring in disquieting rumors. Then the rumors became certainties, and some of the hunters failed to come back at all, and those that came back stayed. The Malanaos were afield again, and Aguacaer walked in the shadow of fear.

By the looks of the American garrison on the fourteenth day after their comrades' departure, something close to fear had come upon them, too. The sentry pacing the river bank at the end of the bamboo bridge constantly shot nervous glances across into the dark underbrush.

The ten seasoned soldiers inside the *nipa*-walled squad-room lounged about wearing full cartridge belts. When night came they would sleep in those belts. And inside the room adjoining, Sergeant Ernst, senior non-com. in charge, sat with a knitted brow and a very worried look in his eyes.

Presently, however, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, he seemed to dismiss his troubles. He glanced restlessly around the room until his eyes fell on a makeshift bookcase—two ammunition boxes nailed together and set on end. At sight of it his face brightened. Books were Sergeant Ernst's one never-failing solace. He got up, selected a much-thumbed volume, returned to his field desk, and began to read.

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AT THAT moment a Filipino *muchacho* came in from the squad-room bearing the tools of his trade, a cloth duster, and a broom and brushes made of the ubiquitous bamboo.

The sergeant, looking up, nodded, and the *muchacho* returned,

"Good morning!"

Then the sergeant settled to his book, and the *muchacho* to his work. A slim, good-looking fellow was the Filipino, middle-aged as age goes in the tropics, a man with a better forehead than usual, and with a curious, wistful, ill-contented light in his eyes.

While the sergeant read, the *muchacho* kept shooting sideways glances at him. And as the sergeant's expression changed, so did the *muchacho's*. The sergeant's brow uncreased, his mouth relaxed, his eyes grew intent with interest. And upon the Filipino's face that wistful, desirous look deepened into something like envy, dashed with hopelessness.

Then, with a placating smile and an apologetic clearing of the throat, he spoke.

"You read very good book this morning, eh, *Sergiente?*"

"What makes you think that, Isidro?" asked the sergeant.

"I watch you when you read," said Isidro. "I think book make you forget. All morning I think you 'fraid, eh? You read, you no more 'fraid. You forget trouble, you forget Malanaos come. I think book tell you—I think book take you—" he struggled for expression—"into new world altogether, eh?" he finished triumphantly.

"By gosh," cried the sergeant, suddenly sitting upright, "I guess that's it, all right. But I never thought of it that way. How in blazes did you know?"

"I think long time," replied Isidro. "I think it maybe what you call magic. *Americano* magic. I no learn, eh?"

"You're pretty ancient, Isidro. Too old, *sabe?* If you were a kid, so high, *bueno*. Uncle Sam teach you then, be your schoolmaster, all right."

"You think maybe I have *mucha dinero*, *mucha* money, maybe I learn then?"

"Oh, sure. You have much money, you hire many teachers. But you no got."

Isidro stood for a moment considering this. Then he went on with his work. He swept the room and dusted it. When he came to dusting the books he worked very carefully. He handled them with a sort of reverence. He opened and leafed over several volumes, softly, timidly, and yet reverently, as one might handle the vestments of a god.

He was squatted on the floor blancoing the sergeant's leggins when Corporal Staley came in out of the blazing sunshine, and sank down on a camp stool.

"Well, heard anything more?" he asked.

"Nothing much. They're bluffed at crossing the river any more, you know. Old Herrera the *mañangette* was in, that's all. He saw three of 'em on the other bank."

"Then you think they're coming?"

"Sure," replied the sergeant.

"Well, hadn't we ought to be doing something?" a little testily.

"What can we do?" Ernst asked. "We were left with orders to protect the town, so we can't run away. The wire to Iloilo is cut, so we can't send for help. We're trenched in already, enough and to spare. No, all we can do is to wait."

"Wait and be boloed," growled Staley. "There'll never be less than a hundred of 'em, and I'd sooner meet the devil himself than a Malanao in the dark with a bolo. At ten to one—mincemeat, that's all we'll be. But I suppose you're right, at that. Oh, the devil! Headquarters sure is a fool."

"I'd hardly say that," replied Ernst. "It's true we were a hundred and we're now twelve; but maybe the rest were needed worse in Luzon. And it's been quiet enough here for three years."

"Reason enough, too. A bluffed Malanao is a good Malanao. Now we're just enough to make an interesting massacre. The Tagalogs 'll get theirs, too."

"Sure; it's a raw deal for them. The pedagogue was in, too—say, there's a boy in love with his work. That's all he could think about—the kids. And I couldn't console him any. The cause of education 'll sure take an awful slump here in about a week's time."

"A week!"

"That's what I figure. They know we can't get help—no hurry. And I don't think there's anybody here yet but scouts. Besides, they're not across the river yet."

"That's right, the river," repeated Staley, thoughtfully.

It was the whole hope of the Americans. The swollen stream would have troubled the strongest swimmer, unincumbered. Weighted down with a rifle and bolo, no

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man could swim it. And the Malanaos, of course, had brought no boats with them across the jungle. Their only hope seemed to be rafts, but they would take time to construct. There were no trees near the opposite river bank, only dense shrubbery and underbrush and *cogon* grass.

"Speaking of that," went on Staley, "what's to prevent some of our brown *amigos* selling us out? They've got boats, and the Malanaos have enough to give for 'em. If they haven't much money, they've opium, and it's the same thing."

"Well, they might," admitted Ernst. I'd hate to think it, but they might."

Just then something drew his attention to the *muchacho.* Isidro was leaning slightly forward, his lips were parted, his luminous brown eyes were fixed on Ernst intently. But they were withdrawn instantly, and Isidro fell to work again swiftly. Almost immediately he finished his work and went out.

"'Pears to me we're taking a chance with that *gugu,* anyway," observed Staley a moment later. "We said too much before him, right now. And this giving him the freedom of the barracks and magazine and everything, like one of us—I don't like it."

"Isidro? Fiddlesticks! He's safe enough. I wish they were all as safe as Isidro. Besides, what can he do?"

From which remark may be deduced the fact that Ernst, besides being a first-class non-com. in many other respects, possessed a comfortable lack of imagination.

ISIDRO at that moment was standing on the bank of the river close to the hundred-foot bamboo bridge, a bridge which Ernst had thought to render useless to the Malanaos by rigging it with barb-wire entanglements that would make any attempt to rush it suicidal. Also, to prevent any possible surprise, these wires were connected with electric bells in the barracks and on the post of the sentry.

It seemed safe enough, as Isidro seemed safe; but had Sergeant Ernst seen the calculating look on Isidro's face as he carefully studied the bridge, he might have gained a new idea concerning the *muchacho's* limitations.

After awhile Isidro turned down-stream, homeward. He did not go directly home however. His first stop was in the middle of the *barrio,* in front of a large frame building, the only one of its kind in Aguacaer. From it there came a strange, sibilant humming, the sound of many children studying in whispers. Also there was a white man's voice, incisive, assured, and the voices of other children repeating after him, falteringly and stumblingly, certain simple lessons in English.

Isidro listened here a long time. He was accustomed so to listen daily. That strong desire of his, that secret, insistent longing, born in him shortly after the coming of the Americans, and of late meaning more to him than life itself, forced him to it.

Always before, however, he had listened happily, rapturously even, albeit wistfully too. Today, as he stood there, digging his bare brown toes into the warm sand, by his face something within him seemed to harden into resolve.

Isidro's next stop was on the river bank again, about a half-mile below the bridge. Here was a peculiar thing—a fish trap. It was a row of stout poles not quite a foot apart, extending clear across the river. And yet not straight across, but diagonally up-stream, so that the arrested water swirled down from the upper end of that row of poles, and piled itself upon the sand at Isidro's feet.

A net was ordinarily stretched across those poles. Fish coming down-stream were caught in it. Trying to continue their course, they followed the net obliquely down until they brought up against the bank. Here they were dipped out with a hand net.

Isidro studied this device as he had studied the bridge, calculatingly, craftily, and finally with a light of triumph in his eyes, as though an ill-defined purpose had suddenly become straight and plain, and he saw its accomplishment ahead.

Then he went home.

His home was on the very edge of the village, a large house even for Aguacaer, three rooms well furnished with bamboo tables and chairs. But below it was most of Isidro's wealth—a long, sharp-pointed *banca,* a fish-net encrusted with scales, short-handled paddles, long harpoons, curiously shaped hoes and hammers and knives. Below it, too, his wife cooked rice in a smoke-blackened iron pot, and their year-old man-child sprawled near-by.

For a long time after darkness had come that night, and after his wife and child

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slept, Isidro sat before his house, a solitary brooder, staring over the roaring water toward the south. At last he rose and launched his *banca*.

As its prow dipped into the water, the current caught it and well-nigh whirled it away from him. But he leaped into its stern, and presently got it in some measure under control, and drove it with hard paddling across the stream, toward the opposite shore, on which were gathering the enemies of his people.

Thus began, on Isidro's part, a period of most mysterious conduct.

The next morning he turned up in barracks with a fagged, drawn face, and eyes that were dull from lack of sleep. When Sergeant Ernst jested him about it, he replied that he had been setting trap nets down the river. But Isidro was a peculiarly unskilful liar, and the sergeant turned away wondering.

In the four days that followed, Isidro sank into a state of incipient physical exhaustion. Whatever his night work was, it was telling on him. His limbs dragged, his cheeks became hollow, his bright and spontaneous smile became forced and deceptive. Furtiveness crept like dry rot into his once frank and open manner.

"What's the matter with you, Isidro?" asked Ernst once, impatiently, "Are you sick, or turned crooked, or just scared stiff, or what?"

And it seemed to the sergeant, his wonder having turned into suspicion, that fear flashed into Isidro's eyes as he faltered out:

"Me—no, *Sergiente*, I no sick. *Mis infante*, he sick. *Mucha* sick, *mucha pobre*, my baby. He cry all night, I no sleep."

But when Sergeant Ernst walked past Isidro's house that afternoon, he saw Isidro's baby playing free-limbed in the hot sand, and stopped and dandled it awhile. And the little brown body was full of such health and strength and springiness that it gripped at the sergeant's heart-strings.

But he was forced to reflect grimly, coming home, that its father was a liar.

In normal times, of course, this would have troubled Ernst very little. But, with mortal danger so threatening his little command from without, he had not dismissed as lightly as had seemed, Staley's suggestion of possible treachery from within. True, he was not as yet able to conceive any possible way Isidro could advantage the Malanaos. But that he was playing a double game of some sort seemed now morally certain.

The men, too, were beginning to realize it. The strain under which they were living made this realization somewhat dangerous for Isidro. Every night they closed their eyes, half expecting the coming of the Malanaos before morning. Several times dark masses of them had been seen in the jungle across the river.

Shots had been heard—probably the killing of game. That the Malanaos did not fire upon the village and the barracks was probably partly due to the scarcity of ammunition, partly to the fact that they did not wish to destroy the village, but to conquer it. To drive the Tagalogs away would not profit them.

Enough were leaving as it was. The obstacle of the river could not delay the Malanaos forever. Their attack was now certain, and certain it was also that the force of the Americans was insufficient to meet it. The Tagalogs knew too that their three-year allegiance to the Americans had increased the old lust of the Malanaos for blood and tyranny and oppression. A dozen families moved away in a night. More would undoubtedly follow. The village, two weeks before so happy, had become a place of secret whisperings and of terror.

ONE morning the American school teacher, a young man and erstwhile an enthusiastic one, came into the barracks with the corners of his lips drawn down.

"My job's quit me," he announced. "Not a kid left. The Malanaos don't approve of schools, they say. White man's knowledge without white man's gun-backing isn't wanted. Can you blame them? What the devil's the matter with you of the military arm, anyway?"

"Don't ask me," replied Sergeant Ernst, "but you'll be lucky if you lose nothing but your job. I've another for you, anyway. Thirteen's an unlucky number, but one more rifleman's a help. Do you want a gun?"

"I was just going to ask you for one."

"Now's the blessed time," replied Ernst, and went into the store-room to get a rifle.

Three of them hung against the wall just above the pile of ammunition boxes. When

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Sergeant Ernst reached for one, it slipped from his hand and fell behind the boxes.

In moving the boxes to get it he found one that was very light. Investigating, he discovered that the top had been many times removed, so that the nails were loose in their sockets, and that the box itself was half empty.

And in this discovery Ernst knew he had read the secret of Isidro's recently lying face and mysterious occupation. Two hundred rounds of ammunition were gone—where possibly but to the Malanaos? And who could have taken it save Isidro?

Sergeant Ernst straightened up with a flushed and threatening countenance, but he said nothing then. An hour later, however, just as Isidro was due in his room, he pretended to go into the *barrio*. He banged the door behind him, but returned silently, and crouched behind his field desk.

Presently Isidro came in. Ernst, peering out, saw him potter around the room, but ever with his eye shifting toward the door of the magazine. Then he opened that door and it closed behind him. Ernst slipped out of his hiding-place and tip-toed across the room.

When Isidro came through the door, Ernst stood fronting him, with coldly accusing eyes. Isidro managed a smile, but the sergeant reached out without another word, gripped his collar, and jerked him close. And, as he had expected, from somewhere about Isidro's clothes there came a dull metallic rattling.

"You rat," snarled Ernst, and suddenly stooped, caught Isidro's knees, jerked him off his feet, and, with Isidro's head barely clearing the floor, shook him as though he were indeed the vermin he had named him.

Then Sergeant Ernst knew the bitterness of treachery and betrayal on the part of one whom he had trusted and in some measure come to love. A shower of cartridges clattered noisily to the floor.

"Oh, you—," began Ernst furiously, and then checked himself with a glance toward the squad-room. He dropped Isidro, who fell sprawling. But he was up again instantly, facing the sergeant with excited, frightened eyes.

"I tell you, *Sergiente;* I explain—" he began.

But Ernst cut him short with a threatening gesture.

"Shut up!" he said, in a strangely cautious tone. "You couldn't explain. Ananias himself couldn't lie out of a fix like this. You're guilty as ——, and that's all there is to it. Now I've got to think what to do."

The first thing he did was strange. He pulled his revolver, held it on Isidro, stepped lightly backward, and closed the door leading into the squad-room. Then he returned to his captive.

"You know why I did that?" he queried. "Well, if those men in there knew what you've done, the devil himself couldn't save you from them. And I don't believe God would try. For of all the dirty tricks I've ever known, I think yours is the worst. You've eaten our bread, you've taken our pay, you've pretended to be our friend. And now you're peddling death to our enemies.

"For money, I suppose, to buy white man's schooling, is that it?" he sneered. "This makes me ashamed that I ever preached it was worth while to treat you brown —— like men. But yet I don't want you killed, God knows why! I'm ashamed of that too, but I don't. And so ——?"

Isidro hadn't understood half the sergeant had said, but he had watched his face intently. Now he held out his hands beseechingly.

"You let me tell you—one word—" he begged again.

"Not a word!" rasped the sergeant. "One more word and I'll shoot you myself. The men might do worse."

He ran his hands over Isidro's body and removed the few cartridges that remained in his pockets. Then he shoved him backward to the door.

You go away," he said. "You *sabe?* You *sigue.* Out of barracks, out of *barrio,* and take your family with you. It's partly because of them, of your kid—But if ever I see you again, I shoot you, I *matar* you, so help me God!"

The last words came like an explosion. Isidro fairly ran down the steps, his spine crinkling with anticipatory fear of a bullet. But none came. Sergeant Ernst turned and began to pick up the cartridges in a slow and discouraged way.

Uppermost in his thought was the fact that he and twelve other fairly decent white men were under orders to die in the attempted protection of people of Isidro's kind.

And Isidro? Within three hours he and

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his wife had fled into the jungle, carrying their child and such of their household goods as they could stagger under. But a little after dark he came back again.

VERY alert was the sentry on the bridge post that night, very watchful and alert. But a mist was over the stars, and the river made a great roaring, and the bridge creaked incessantly under the strain of the water.

He was thankful he hadn't to depend on his own unaided senses to discover hostile forms or footsteps upon the bridge. He was glad he had his sergeant's assurance concerning the infallibility of the electric alarm placed midway on his post.

Nevertheless he was watchful. Regularly as clockwork, he paced back and forth, a distance of perhaps fifty yards. At each extremity of his post he reported to another sentry, the three of them forming a cordon completely surrounding the barracks. As he walked he strained his eyes over the river bank and the river and the bridge, and he listened intently for the least suspicious sound.

Once he thought he heard something, a shuffling, a dragging, and he stopped short. Then he walked to the end of the bridge, and looked and listened. But he could hear nothing save the sound of the river, and as far as he could see out on the bridge, which was not far, there was nothing but the wire-entangled bamboo timbers.

He returned to walking his post again, and his attention drifted a little. He fell to thinking of a vine-covered cottage in the States, of an old woman in it, and he wondered whether he should ever see them again.

Then, suddenly and without reason save a swift intuition of danger, his attention snapped back to the present. He stopped again, just opposite the bridge, his rifle this time coming noiselessly to the "ready."

And very plainly he heard it now, the sound of some one—of a great many—creeping upon the bridge. And he heard the slight twang and rustle of a parted and falling wire.

Instantly he knew there had been treachery, for the bell which should have given warning of this approach was as silent as the dead. Instantly—for he had been one of the most suspicious in the barracks—he thought of Isidro. And instantly he fired, without challenge, the speediest way of giving the alarm.

At the sound of his rifle there came a confusion of action. First, two more rifle shots, from the other sentries, echoed his. Next a dark form leaped up from near the end of the bridge, and plunged forward to the bank. Then a horrible sound, a full-throated, maniacal yelling of a hundred or more, arose along the whole length of the bridge, and suddenly the bridge itself seemed to bulk higher in the darkness as the savages that were on it came to their feet and sprang forward.

Close upon this followed swift, excited voices and the sound of hurried movements from the barracks as the little handful of white men answered what each felt to be his last call to arms.

But the sentry had already fired again. He had stuck to his post and fired again, moved by a stronger feeling than either the instinct of self-preservation or the lust of battle or natural hatred of the barbaric enemy. For the dim light had revealed to him that first leaping figure as Isidro, and the sentry felt as though death would be a paltry thing if he could first satisfy his rage against the traitor.

At the second report of the sentry's rifle, Isidro fell. For an instant the sentry thought his bullet had found its mark. Then he realized that Isidro's fall had been simultaneous with the pressing of the trigger. And Isidro, prone upon the ground, was active, he was moving—he had done an incomprehensible thing.

He had struck a match.

By the light of that match the sentry fired his third shot, straight at Isidro's head. He had the satisfaction of seeing Isidro crumple upon the ground. And then his satisfaction became mingled with a great bewilderment, for close upon the flash of the match had followed another incomprehensible thing.

A dull, muffled explosion at the end of the bridge. A tearing apart and a crashing sound, as of the disruption of timbers. A sudden flare, dying away instantly, but by the light of which the sentry saw the bridge, crowded with squat, half-naked figures brandishing rifles and bolos, lift up, reel, sway sideways, and fall into the river.

And as it fell he heard the wild, triumphant yells of the men that crowded the bridge change into cries of amazement and terror.

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These in turn choked into silence as the bridge struck the water. Then the sentry, his bewilderment illumined suddenly by a great divination, turned and ran pell-mell toward the barracks.

"Gee, what a chance!" he gasped half aloud as he ran. "If we can only get them—if we can only get there in time!"

He need not have doubted. When he got to the barracks, which was a matter of seconds, the men were already under arms and ready. And when he explained to them, with stuttering excitement, what had happened, they were off in an instant, down stream on a dead run, trying to beat each other to the trap for fishes, which was to serve that night another purpose.

WHEN they reached it, the Malanaos had already brought up against it, against that barrier of poles stretched slantwise down the current. Whatever weapons they had held in their hands at the moment of the catastrophe—all of their rifles and many of their edged weapons—had gone to the bottom of the river.

Their motions were impeded by the débris of the bamboo bridge; they could not in any event have made way against the current; they could not reach the tops of the poles to scramble over them; they had but two choices, to cling to the poles and drown, or to allow themselves to be carried down the incline toward the Aguacaer side of the river, where the Americans waited.

Life is sweet even to a Malanao, and drowning is not a proper warrior's death. Also it may be that many of them remembered others that had been taken prisoners by the Americans, and had returned later fattened and with strange stories to tell.

Almost as a unit, they chose captivity. But they came ashore singly, so it remained but to take them from the water, exhausted and strangling, to bind them with their own rags of clothing, and to stretch them in rows upon the bank, helpless as cordwood.

A few were drowned, a few indeed reached the opposite shore and escaped. But when the Americans came to count up their prisoners they totaled eighty-two. It was worse than a defeat, it was a catastrophe. To Aguacaer it spelled salvation.

For though the news might spread, though other Malanao warriors might take up the quarrel, though indeed within two weeks they again swarmed vengefully against the town, by that time this story had traveled to headquarters in Iloilo, the wheels of the military machine had turned, and the garrison at Aguacaer was full-manned again, and ready.

Ready, and willing too, to spill its white man's blood in defense of the town, and of a certain other trust that had come upon it.

For by the time Ernst and his men had fished out the last of their captives, they had come to a pretty close understanding of the truth. Sergeant Ernst had told his story and the sentry his.

Isidro had stolen the cartridges to procure powder with which to blow up the bridge; he had cut the electric wires and the wire entanglements; he had bargained with the Malanaos to do this and so to betray Aguacaer and the Americans into their hands, but instead had delivered the Malanaos into the hands of the Americans. But why? What motive stronger than the fear of death had impelled him?

They discovered it a moment after they had gathered around the slim brown figure lying motionless on the ground, a moment after Sergeant Ernst had taken it in his arms. For at his touch the limp figure quivered, the whitening lips parted, and Isidro, struggling for expression out of the Shadow, spoke his soul in these words:

"*Sergiente*, my *amigo!* My *infante*, my baby, you see he go to white man's school? You see he learn white man's book magic? That is why I do this, so he have a chance to learn. You promise, eh, *Sergiente?*"

Emotion had Sergeant Ernst by the throat, but he managed to gasp tensely—

"Isidro, my friend, my little brother, of course I will. In the name of my country and my flag, I promise it. So do all these, your friends. Your wife will be cared for, your child will be schooled, we'll all see to it, we'll——"

"*Bueno*," breathed Isidro. "It is all good, then." And slipped away.

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A FRONTIER ROMANCE

by EDWIN L. SABIN

THE fighting sixties on the great plains were drawing to a close. In the north, the Union Pacific Railway had won through and across the mountains, and the continent had been bridged. In the south the Kansas Pacific was following the old stage trail, for Denver; Custer had smashed Black Kettle's Cheyennes and Arapahoes down on the Washita; the United States Board of Indian Commissioners were hard at work—worthy gentlemen all.

"We want peace," had declared Black Kettle, and Big Mouth, the Arapaho. "Peace has come," had proclaimed the commissioners; and Sheridan, instructed by Sherman to "hold out the olive branch with one hand and the sword with the other," had warned that there would be a predatory war for years.

Some fifty miles east of Denver had been basking in the September sunset the Big K ranch—a feudal keep squalid with its nucleus of low dingy adobe buildings but bold with its crest which, its knightly riders boasted, "could be seen before you could see the cow." The riders all were out, save one. The old man either was in Denver or on his way back. The Chinese cook was singing querulously as he washed the dishes.

The girl, the old man's daughter, stood in the rude living-room doorway, under the sodded eaves, and gazed at the pink-fringed, empurpling distant range, where lay mystery. On the threshold of the bunk-house sat the one rider, his hat over his eyes. He gazed, not at the sunset, but at her. Afar stretched the sagy plains—they, also, enshrouded in mystery.

From the corral a calf bawled insistently—the only complaining note, and yet not inharmonious. The girl appeared to have temporarily forgotten him, but he was her charge. The man stirred restlessly, swept premises and plains with a searching glance, and rose.

"Reckon that little fellow's hungry," he said. "Want me to feed him?"

She started from her dream, and viewed him with softly misted eyes. Dark, passionate, possibly wilful, she had the clean, straight beauty of a prairie flower, which would bend, but would not break. Not a bad-looking figure, also, of a man was he, in the customary plains garb of boots, belted jeans trousers, flannel shirt, neck handkerchief, black slouch hat.

"Oh!" she uttered. "I did forget. No, I'll feed him."

She vanished into the house. He strode swiftly to the bunk-house, reached within and hastily buckled on a revolver in holster. When she emerged from the kitchen, a milk basin in her hands, he was standing, as if meditatively awaiting. Together they went to the corral.

"Are you going to ride again?" she asked. "You've put on your gun, and your horse is still saddled, isn't it? I hear him."

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"There's always a chance of ridin'. A feller never knows. Want to go?"

"Not tonight, thanks. I'd love to—but dad's liable to come and he'd be worried. I ought to stay."

The man laughed easily.

"Injuns? Pshaw! Haven't seen an Injun outside of a few in Denver for six months. Don't you want to go, just a small piece? I've kep' your hoss out for you, on purpose. The boss may not come rolling in till morning, anyhow."

She shook her head, but smiled upon him gently, even fondly.

"I oughtn't. Dad'd be worried. He says it isn't safe. The Sioux are still holding out—and there are others, too. The buffalo'll be drifting south, soon now."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"All right. But here—lemme set your pan in the corner, where that boy won't step on it."

"I'll set it. He's mine."

She stooped. The calf thrust forward an eager nose. Laughingly she pushed him back as she slipped the basin of milk under the rail. With sudden movement the man seized her, picked her up bodily, and running, stumbling, panting, bore her away.

For an instant the fierce onslaught numbed her; the very astonishment overwhelmed her. Then with a scream of fright and anger she fought for release. Her lithe, slim body writhed in his strong embrace, and she strove to free her arms. But the corral fence was quickly circumvented, and only at the end of the bunk-house, where were the two horses, did he pause.

The horses snorted and sidled, and subsided standing close together. With one hand he whipped their tethers off; and now he flung the girl upon a saddle.

"You sit there," he rasped

He held her by the arm, his fingers bit into her flesh, as he maneuvered to mount the other saddle, himself.

Her physical force was near spent, and frightened she was, indeed.

"Jeff! What do you mean?"

"I mean business."

From the kitchen doorway the Chinaman cook, attention attracted by the scream, came shuffling and protestant.

"Hi, you!" he yelled, shrilly. "No, no!"

From the saddle the man's leveled finger halted him in his advance.

"You shut up!"

The cook stopped as abruptly as if the finger were a revolver barrel. Before his bewildered stare the couple were wheeled, and away—and so close against the girl pressed the man and horse that she could not swing loose.

From the ranch yard the Chinaman, frenzied, shrieked after.

"Injuns! No go! You get 'um Injuns."

The man laughed mirthlessly.

"You —— Chink," he retorted. "I've got more hair on my teeth than you have on your head. But we'll risk Injuns, all samee."

Leaning forward, he grasped the girl's horse near to the cheek-strap, and thus guided, on into the dusk they galloped.

"Oh, I hate you!" she faltered, "I hate you."

He did not reply. But safely out he slackened, and while making new arrangements, plead. Now she did not answer.

They proceeded, at steady lope and trot; the girl, bare-headed, in her calico dress, her skirts tightly gathered under her as she rode cross-saddle; he, with the picket-rope of her bridleless animal in hand, his six-shooter holster loosely dangling against his right thigh, the stock of his rifle projecting along the saddle-flap underneath his left leg. Their course was eastward.

IN THE black velvet sky over the Colorado plains the pointers of the Great Dipper had made a third the circuit of the North star when the man checked his horse. The other horse, on the picket-rope, forged even and also slacked.

The man peered across, inquiringly scanning the pale face of the girl. Weary though she was, her figure stiffened, and her eyes blazed scornful defiance.

"I'm awful sorry, Sue, but I had to do it," he pleaded. "You'll think better of me after a bit. I'll surely be good to you."

She only gazed, fury in every fiber.

"We got to stop and breathe these hosses, and rest a piece, ourselves," he informed. "There's a water-hole ahead. Least, there ought to be."

He moved the horses forward at a fast walk. Through the enveloping dusk, star lighted, barked a coyote, the jackal of the West, and the unmusical notes rose to a chorus. This, and a certain feel to the air, and a slight thinning of the lowest eastern horizon, spelled dawn. But all the ghostly

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dimmed expanse of sage and rosinweed, of level, draw and solitary butte lay slumberous, mystic, almost ominous.

Presently the man again appealed.

"Can't say a word to a fellow? Hang it, I'd rather you'd lambast me some more than be dumb."

But he evoked no reply.

His jaw set, his lips compressed beneath his crisply clipped tawny-bleached mustache—bleached by Western sun and wind—he stubbornly pushed on. His revolver holster regularly thumped, the bridle from the girl's horse faintly jangled at his saddle-horn where he had hung it, the horses puffed and blew and occasionally stumbled, and he peered ahead, scowling.

Suddenly he drew rein; the ears of the horses pricked. He advanced again, swerving to the left, halted, and abruptly dismounted. They were on the edge of a circular depression, at the base of a small sandstone butte; perhaps an old buffalo-wallow, widened by wash. A faint, brackish smell tinged the chill air; the remnant bones of some animal gleamed whitely under foot; the horses, noses outstretched, advanced of themselves, snorting suspiciously as they descended the slight incline of the cup.

"There ought to be plenty water here, this time of year," he remarked. And then he added, as the horses stopped, to lower their noses and gingerly sniff:

"Gosh, there isn't much, though. Never did find so little, before. Reckon the season's been too dry. Huh! Hosses may drink it, but I doubt if we can. Think you can stand it?"

The girl, spectral in the dusk, made no answer. The horses sipped under protest—swallowing briefly, nosing here and there, lifting their heads to stare about and snort.

"Drink if you want to, or quit," he bade, impatient.

The scummy surface, stirred by the noses, emitted a smell stronger and more dank. The horses, having wet their throats, refused to drink further; they stared and snorted. He led them up the short slope, to the rim.

He deftly slipped the bit from his mount's mouth, uncoiled the picket-rope, and driving the stake, picketed both horses.

"You'd better get off, Sue," he directed. "No use sitting there. You'll wear out the hoss and yourself. We'll make dry camp, but next stretch'll fetch us to water, sure. Shucks! I ought to've brought a canteen. Get off, now, and lay down; or do you want me to lift you off?"

She sprang free, staggered on stiffened limbs, and proudly stood erect, instinctively adjusted her hair.

He loosened the cinches, and detached his slicker and coat from his saddle.

"Here," he proffered, firmly but not unkindly. "Lay down, now, and I'll wrap you up. Lemme put one on you, first."

She shook her head.

"All right, but you lay down. Can't you speak? You might as well take things as easy as you can. I'm no plumb brute."

She hesitated, and walking apart stretched herself amidst the sage. Following, he folded the coat for her head, spread the slicker over her, carefully tucked it about her. Only her face was now revealed. Motionless, unassisting, she gazed wide-eyed up at him when he had finished.

"I hate you," she said. "You coward!"

She turned her face, pillowed her cheek on one hand, and closed her eyes.

"That's it. Try to sleep, honey," he urged. "I'll be sitting yonder."

On clumsy tiptoe he withdrew, and seated himself near the picket stake; eased himself by dropping his holster and cartridge-weighted belt; sighed, scratched his head, pulled down his hat; and with knees high, waited.

The horses cropped only intermittently, between-times staring into the dimness, ears erect, nostrils expanded. Unexpectedly the girl spoke again, her voice carrying clearly.

"What's the matter with the horses? They act queer."

"Wolves around, I reckon," he answered. "They're always round a water-hole. But you go to sleep, honey. I'll take care of things."

However, evidently his own explanation had not entirely satisfied him. For in a minute or two he arose, quietly stepped to his horse and extracted the rifle from its saddle scabbard. He reseated himself, the rifle across his knees, his ears attuned to every movement of the horses, every rustle in the brush, every breathing of the girl, his eyes sharpened to pierce the deceptive dusk that invested apparent safety with dangers to be feared the more while unknown.

The pale strip low in the east gradually widened upward, the dusk slowly thinned, little by little exposing more and more the

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details of the landscape. A bird twittered tentatively, on silent pads a coyote trotted, weaving like a shadow through the sage and greasewood. With observant eye the man noticed him; stood and gazed after, and swept a searching glance around, his eyes lingering on distant objects here and there. The horses were hunched, heads drooping, for the chill had increased, driven forward by the advancing sun.

He abruptly donned belt and holster and decisively strode across to the figure prone under the slicker. At his approaching step the girl awakened instantly; half sat up, and re-arranged her hair. Her eyes were clouded, she smiled bewildered. But as he spoke she lapsed into her dumb, repellant scorn.

"I reckon we'd better go, now, Sue," he said. "I want to make as far as we can before the sun's too hot. You be gettin' ready, will you? The hosses may need another drink. How are you? Powerful thirsty? Could you chew a little meat? There's some jerked beef in my saddle-bag.

She shook her head, threw off the slicker, and sat straighter.

"Put on that coat of mine, honey," he bade. "Please. Will you? You'll need it, riding."

He left, to attend to the horses. They would not drink. He slipped the bit into his mount's mouth, tightened the cinches of both animals, and turned for the girl. She was standing, mute, her back to him, but she had put on his coat.

"Still hating me?" he queried.

She nodded, and faced him.

"Well, get on, anyway. You may hate me, but I sure love you, and I'm going to make you know it. You didn't use to hate me," he repeated, musingly. "You didn't use to hate me. If I'd waited to get married to you regular you wouldn't hate me now. I declare, I don't see what difference there is between a preacher in Denver and a preacher somewheres else."

She said nothing.

"Here," he proffered, extending his hand as a stepping block. "Climb on."

She barely touched it with her foot as she clambered with forced litheness into the saddle. He picked up his slicker, stowed it behind his cantle, and mounted, himself. Lead-rope in hand, he clucked to his horse, and they started.

THE sky was brightening, the east glowed golden, before them shone radiant the morning star—the rest of the heavens was blank, for all the sparkling firmament had vanished. From their path fluttered little brown birds; above the sage hung a wraith-like mist; the tips of the buttes were pinkish, through the expectant air exhaled many pungent odors; an owl flapped swiftly, winging to cover.

Redder grew the west, blushing like a bride arraying herself to lean upon the arm of the masterful groom. And he came, the sun, surging into sight, triumphant over time and space, a champion untrumpeted. From under the horses' hoofs a gaunt jack-rabbit leaped aside, to hop, and squat, worshipful, in the first broad beams.

"Purty, wasn't it?" invited the man.

The girl answered, but at a tangent.

"Did you find out what was the matter with the horses, back where we were?"

"Wolves, is all. Must have smelled 'em. I didn't see none."

"Oh!"

She uttered it falteringly, as if another question was on her lips, and checked herself. But her query sent his gaze roving again, as they loped; from under his hat-brim scanning the distance right and left, before, and once or twice behind.

Suddenly his gaze fixed, narrowed, focussed, and with brow puckered he squinted long, while the horses methodically rose and fell, pounding over the hard turf. His face hardened strangely. Without a word he changed their course. But the girl was apprized. Her eyes were as keen as his.

"Indians!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Jeff! Indians!"

"Maybe not," he reassured. "Maybe only the old man. He'll be hot on our trail, with a posse, soon as he finds out."

"No." And her voice held a little wail. "I can tell whites from Indians, as well as you. They're not whites; whites don't ride that way. They're bare-headed, too. What would they be? 'Rapahoes? Cheyennes? Do you think they've seen us?"

He weighed her words.

"If they've seen us, we'll soon find out. Chances are they're 'Rapahoes, anyway. Cheyennes are up north, following the buffalo. You don't mind 'Rapahoes, honey. We'll just keep off to the left, and if they come down on us all they'll want to do is palaver for sugar and coffee. They'll soon

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find we haven't any. 'Rapahoes! Why, you know you needn't be more afraid of a 'Rapaho than of a coyote, honey!"

She did not reply. In silence they rode, edging more and more to the left. Her eyes were intent; leveled, from face half turned, into that other direction.

Only plains eyes, like hers and his, could so quickly have picked out, from far upon the greenish-yellow sea, that line of moving dots which, quartering behind, momentarily had skimmed a little rise and now were lost to sight. But no antelope were they. Horses and riders, traveling hard.

A shallow draw concealed them. Ten minutes more, during which the basking sage, roused, danced to the hoof-beats while the vast surrounding horizon watched—and the girl again exclaimed.

"They've seen us!" Her words came spasmodic. The man glanced, but he had known, from the first.

"Looks like it." His speech was shortly clipped.

"Cheyennes?"

"'Fraid so."

The line had debouched from the draw into the open flat, and now was much, much nearer. Debouching, it had split; and while the one file careered onward, gradually obliquing in almost abreast, the off-shoot seemed bent upon the trail itself.

Naked of body, in the sunlight, and bare of head, were these wild riders, sitting with knees high, on low-running ponies, bent forward, plying quirt and heels. Braids streamed, robes flared, lance tufts fluttered, painted shields glanced. No beggarly Arapahoes ever rode like these.

And from them issued never a cry.

"Or maybe Sioux. Hard to tell," muttered the man.

"What'll we do, Jeff?"

"Keep going, honey. The railroad won't be very far, and there ought to be some ranches off yonder. If these hosses were only fresh—" and he left the prayer partially unvoiced.

"Anyway, we can stand 'em off," he added, with essayed confidence.

The race was on in grim earnest. The sun mounted higher, to witness; the contented plains shimmered, the prairie dogs chattered, annoyed at the interruption, and the chase constantly tightened.

The scouring line on the right had drawn ahead—reaching, reaching, relentless. The line behind had crossed the trail and was veering on, and in the apex of the forming triangle was the laboring quarry. The pressure on the right was beginning to tell. The course had markedly changed—from east to northwest, thence to north, and gradually was describing a great arc, reversing on itself. Only the unsheathed rifle of the man held the two sides of the triangle apart, Not a shot had yet been fired, but the shifting muzzle silently threatened. However, when the triangle closed, in front, it would become a circle, an oval, contracting as pitilessly as the walls of a Poe's pit.

The two horses in the center had required no urging. They, also, knew Indians. But their pace had perceptibly flagged; ere the chase had commenced, they had covered long miles. The girl had spoken not again. Once the man, appraising with rapid eyes, had uttered, "Cheyennes." The word was unqualified; it needed no explanation. He might have as simply said "cyclone," "smallpox," or "the devil," and have been understood.

The two horses wheezed, galloped, stumbled, recovered, and forged on; their eyes bulged, their shoulders lathered, dusty sweat caked their haunches, their dried tongues flopped. But the man now panted exultant:

"All right, honey! We'll stand 'em off."

"Where?"

"Close ahead, yonder! There's cover. See it?"

"Oh! I'm so glad."

A low crenelated uplift broke the sage; scant quarter of a mile onward in their circumscribed route as now projected, it was the remains of an adobe ranch building.

"They'll cut us off!" gasped the girl.

The man hotly cursed.

"They won't, by ——!"

He slipped his arm though the reins, threw rifle to shoulder, pressed trigger and jerked lever—again, and again, and yet again. The reports drummed flatly. On right and left before them, the half-naked riders dived to the far side of their ponies. There, a pony reared, plunged backward, and its rider landed nimbly afoot. The converging lines panically swerved outward and widened; a sudden shrill chorus of whoops and yells pealed to the very blue. Amidst the clamor and the hiss of fast loosed arrow, with smoking rifle the man flung himself to earth at the adobe shack.

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The girl sprang, fell, stood.

"Inside, quick!" he ordered. "Here!"

He passed her the rifle, and dragging a horse, followed her; darted out and dragged in the other horse.

With fury of taunt and shriek the chase rushed by, united in giddy circle, and they were corralled.

THE shack had been a little way-station on an old stage road. Fire had gutted it, agents human but as destructive had dismantled it. Door and window shutters were gone, the sod remnants of the roof had tumbled in, and the walls had disintegrated to the casements.

"Sit down! No—lie down!" he commanded, sharply.

He seized the rifle and from behind the breastworks fired hastily through this embrasure, and through that. With eager fingers he plucked at his belt and stuffed cartridges into the magazine.

"—— 'em, I got one, all right," he announced. "We'll show 'em."

The girl, pale and disheveled, her eye glowing, sat tensely. The two horses stood straddle-legged, heaving and listless. Outside the clamor swelled, where the red Ishmaelite, the Cheyenne dog-soldier, brandishing lance and bow and gun and hurling his taunts, drew the warlock ring within which was death.

Around and around shuttled the circle, in endless panorama of ponies, vari-colored clinging figures, and eddying dust. It was the preliminary menace, but the circle was gradually closing, like the fold of a constrictor. Arrows, shot futilely, whisked down nearer, nearer, hungry for the mark. Imperceptibly the range was lessening. A bullet struck the window ledge above the girl's head, showered her with adobe splinters, and hummed triumphantly on.

From the shuttling circle a warrior veered abruptly into the magic space; but at half distance he swerved, to loose daring arrow and defiant shout. The bullet from the rifle caught him, toppled him limp, and bounding on his shoulders he started on a long journey.

The man behind the rifle grunted satisfaction. The girl ejaculated, shuddered, and closed her eyes against the sight.

Other warriors tried. One remained, sprawled and lax. Another, to the man's disgust, escaped Scot-free. Another lost his pony, and afoot, running, dodging, was received with jeers into the rank of his comrades.

"We'll larn 'em," muttered the man. "But I hate to waste ca'tridges."

The sun, overhead, signaled noon. All the plains were vibrant with heat, and within the adobe the stripe of shade had shrunk to tenuous threads. The horses panted. The air, as if enclosed, hung bluish with powder-fumes. Outside was a lull in the attack. The majority of the Indians dismounted, resting their ponies and themselves. But the adobe ruin was still the center, and around it a few warriors still loped.

Out of parched lips the girl spoke.

"I don't suppose there's any way of getting water, is there, Jeff?"

"Honey, I don't know. If you'll keep me covered I'll try the well, yonder. Maybe I can fetch you a hatful. Now's a good time."

He handed her the rifle. She dumbly took it, and dumbly let him go. He energetically vaulted over a crumbled place in the wall, to stride for the well. Braced and peering, rifle at the ready, she watched him and the circle segment beyond. He had but twenty feet to cross; the well was denoted by broken windlass, disjointed curb, and blackened fragments of what might have been a passage-way.

But ere ever he reached it, hell broke loose again. All the squatting, loping circle waked to savage fury, volleyed him with shout and arrow and powder belch. He stooped over the well, peeping in, shading his eyes with his hand; lying flat he dipped with his hat, and turning came diving headlong, for shelter. Breathless he arrived, dropped the hat, seized the gun, shot once, twice, and ceased, puffing.

"Sorry, honey, but there ain't any water there. Well's all choked up, with a dead animal stuck in, besides."

"Didn't you have water in your hat?"

He laughed.

"No. I thought I'd fool 'em a bit, but I reckon they know as well as me. Riled 'em, though."

"You're hurt, Jeff!" She saw the blood dying his shirt under the arm. "What is it? A bullet?" Her voice rang piteous, she sprang for him.

"Just a scratch on the ribs," he answered. "It's nothing. They can't shoot. Never

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saw an Injun who could. But you sit down — I say, sit down!"

He threw her roughly behind him, for his words belied him. The circle was in full motion, screeching, jeering, and shooting truly at last.

Bullets spatted against the adobe, and whined venomous close above; with soft sibilance the arrows pattered in—to glance from the baked clay, to quiver in the sand, to jut half buried in the piled sods. Announced by a dull thud, one feathered arrow wickedly wig-wagged and struck a horse's haunch—the girl's horse. The animal cringed, bawled, straightened, kicked madly —"Watch out!" cried the man, alarmed— and crazed with the surprise of pain bolted through the doorway, to stampede athwart the open. In a minute more, bristling with shafts it had been reduced to a heap.

However, there was no time now for commiseration. The tide of attack seemed at the flood, borne on the crest of even so slight an encouragement as a killed horse. From point to point the man shot carefully; the wide eyes of the huddled girl followed his every movement, she caught at his every exclamation. His face was grim with determination, blackened with powder-smut, but aflame with the zest of battle.

"Lordy!" he muttered. "If I could only get that chief!"

"Which one?"

"The devil on a yellow hoss. Can't somehow hit him."

A smart metallic impact interrupted him, tore the rifle from his grasp and sent him whirling. Involuntarily he wrung his fingers, but snatched from his holster his revolver and with a leap to his post shot rapidly. From the other side he emptied the cylinder.

A lusty, full-toned chorus of triumphant derision had greeted him—but it suddenly died, died the storm of bullet and arrow. The descending hammer clicked, to his final aim, and he lowered the weapon.

"Did it hurt you, Jeff?"

"No; but it spoiled a good gun." With a swift survey outside, he picked up the rifle where it had been flung. The chance bullet had landed fairly on the grip, splintered it and driven in the lock-plate. The gun was out of commission. His chin was bleeding from the splinters.

"You've got your six-shooter though."

"Yes, we got the six-shooter.

He rammed the spent cartridges from the cylinder and fumbled along his belt. A certain painful comprehension crept into his strained face. He slowly tucked a cartridge into the cylinder, twirled the chamber to place, and passed the gun to the girl.

"Here," he said, and flushed. "It's yourn."

"No, it isn't. What do I want of it? You're doing the shooting."

"I was, honey." He spoke gently, and hesitant. "But there's only one ca'tridge."

SHE viewed him puzzled—then her consternation faded.

"Why,—what are those in your belt? You've got some, yet."

"Those are all forty-fours, honey, and this gun is a forty-five. You see, it isn't my gun." He flushed deeper. "I borrowed it, on a sudden. Mine's busted. I reckon I'm a gun thief as well as a girl thief; but I borrowed it, to tide me over. Just natur'ly grabbed it out of a holster, coming from the bunk-house, and left mine. Didn't think about it being a forty-five. I suppose," he reasoned, self-accusing, "I oughtn't to have used it so reckless, but I saw red and didn't think, and they were going to rush us. There's the one ca'tridge though. Glad of that. I always carry a gun with the hammer over an empty chamber." He still extended it. "Take it, honey. It's yourn."

"Mine? Why?"

But she shrank, because she knew.

He instructed her awkwardly.

"Well, honey, they may rush us again— and before they get their hands on you— you see, I can't keep 'em off, long; I'll do the best I can—" and his voice broke. "Wish I hadn't shot so reckless, but I had to. They sure were coming, after they seen that rifle go. Anyway, you've the gun, and the ca'tridge, and you'll know what to do, won't you, honey?"

She stared, affrighted, awe-smitten.

"But what will *you* do?"

"Me?" He laughed shortly. "Oh, I'm a man. You're a woman. God! And I brought you here!"

He shivered, and bit his cracked lip, cast a calculating glance around the close quarters.

"I'll see myself through, honey. As long as I can swing that rifle-barrel—but don't

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you wait much. They won't want me, especial; they'll want you; but they won't get either of us. And no matter what does happen to me, don't you wait. Understand? Don't you wait. Take the gun, honey," he pleaded.

As in a dream, she accepted; turned the heavy weapon over wonderingly.

"You think they *will* try again? Maybe they've had enough."

"I was hoping so, after I'd grassed all those fellows, and they'd found us bad medicine. I was hoping we might hold 'em off till the old man's party lit onto us; and he's hot after us, long before this; ought to've been hearing the shooting, should think, if he's on the right trail. But I dunno. Looks to me, honey, as though they were hatching fresh devilment."

He surveyed reflectively; her gaze joined with his. The attack had ceased entirely. Save for the several figures struck down and scattered where they had fallen—one now attempting to crawl—the recent circle was drawn together in a compact focus of warriors mounted and dismounted, harangued by a single figure on a yellow pony. All in silence they listened; his guttural voice could be heard addressing them passionately; occasionally they stirred restless, as his words bit their turbulent hearts.

"That's the devil," remarked the man. "That's the devil I've been trying to get." His brows knitted, and his eyes set avid. "If I could only have got *him*. I don't reckon he's a chief. Think I killed the chief, on a black hoss. He doesn't wear no head-dress—must be a medicine-man. —— him!" He spat the curse; meant it.

"If you'd killed him, would they have quit?"

"It would have discouraged 'em a heap more, honey. Chief gone, and medicine-man gone—Few Injuns 'll stand that, 'specially Cheyennes. They're strong on medicine-men. P'raps they'd have pow-wowed, to elect another leader—and that might have given us a chance, after dark. One hoss, and a busted rifle—" and he shrugged his shoulders. "Anyway, 'spect now they think he's bullet-proof, and that's not a good thing for 'em to think."

With impulsive movement she thrust the revolver at him.

"Then kill him, Jeff. There he is, standing still. Shoot—quick!"

Mechanically he extended his hand, groping, his eyes upon the mark so fairly outlined, detached in the fore-front of the group. He bethought himself; his hand clenched, and dropped; he shook his head resolutely.

"One ca'tridge, remember, honey; and that's yourn."

"Couldn't you hit him? Is he too far?"

He hungrily measured the distance.

"I could reach him, and over-reach him. If I had plenty of ca'tridges—even *two* ca'tridges, but—" and he threw back his head, breathed deeply. "Nope. I'd have risked it, but we're down to the one. That's yourn. We've got to keep it—*got* to keep it. I'm afraid, honey, you'll need it."

"Won't you shoot? Jeff! You must! You say there'd be a chance. He's coming nearer. Here! Don't mind me. I'll go the way you go, Jeff. I don't want the cartridge."

She clung to him; imploring, wrenching at his arm, endeavoring to press the revolver butt into his clenched fingers.

"I'll go the way you go, Jeff. I'll fight till they kill me. I'll not let them put their hands on me. Truly I won't. I can club, the same as you. But maybe I won't have to. Take it and shoot, Jeff. There's the chance—for both. Please do. They don't know we haven't any more."

He firmly held her off.

"No, honey. I'm the man, you're the woman, they're Injuns."

"Won't you try? He's so close. You couldn't miss."

"I wouldn't risk that ca'tridge if he was only ten feet away," he declared.

"What's he doing?"

"He'll prob'bly cuss us a bit, making medicine; then they'll rush us. I've told you the rest—you know what to do in time. I'm sorry I made you hate me, honey. Reckon I used you pretty rough, but I didn't look for this. Maybe you wouldn't have kept on hating me. I'd do anything to get you out of here—I wish I hadn't done what I did, for I'm not all bad. But I can't use that ca'tridge." He hesitated, and scowled. "You dirty varmint!" he called, "If you knowed how safe you were——"

His words were drowned by a thunderous report. He had not seen the stealthy, determined poise of the girl, as she raised the long barrel of the revolver. The Indian on the yellow pony had boldly ridden forward,

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to halt, and sit, full front; with exposed naked chest and uplifted braceleted arm and sonorous imprecation challenging the beleaguered ruins to wreak their worst upon his fancied magic.

Behind him the group of warriors, crouched tense for the instant when he should slip their leash and launch them to the charge of glory. Still a hundred yards distant he was—bronzed, painted, swollen with savage zeal; and already the throats behind were opening to the hard-pent yell, for answer to his summons—when the revolver made answer. With second-interval, the heavy bullet smacked.

Bent backward by the concussion, sheer from his seat was he lifted; recovered, swayed, clutched at the air.

"By God, you got him!" gasped the man.

He screeched horribly, his chest streamed red, his pony whirled, there was one glimpse of a visage convulsed, and down he pitched, crumpled, sack-like, dead. The living bolt was launched, but not for the butt beyond. A dozen hands reached out in tardy succor. Then the group closed about him, and bore him back, too late.

The girl was exclaiming wildly.

"I didn't aim, Jeff. But I prayed, and shot—and I killed him. You wouldn't shoot, you know. I had to. I didn't aim; I only prayed not to miss. Was it a good shot? Was I wrong? I didn't want the cartridge, and you said you didn't. But you said there was a chance. Now it's gone—the cartridge; we haven't any others, but I'm not afraid. Do you think they'll do anything?" she faltered.

"Honey!"

He choked, dashed his grimy hand across his eyes, stepped blindly for her; stopped.

"No, it's all right, honey. You did it—but you oughtn't to've. The risk was too great; and anyway—Then his jaw stiffened. "We'll arrange for you, somehow, if they come. For one thing, they'll be raving mad. But they aren't coming, yet." And he surveyed. "Nope. You've given us another breathing space, and every little counts." He ejaculated, startled: "What! By thunder! I believe—hooray!"

"Listen!" she panted. "Did you hear? Wasn't that—? Maybe they see something! Oh, Jeff!"

His eyes swept swiftly, avid with hope. Out among the clustered warriors there were gesticulations, commotion, confusion; riders galloped, gathering the dead; lances brandished, fists were shaken, and with one last volley, and a last, despairing yell, by concerted action wheeling their ponies the Cheyennes scampered for the purple horizon.

A faint shout followed. Here it came, the white relief, racing on in an eddy of yellow dust, broad hat-brims flaring, rifles flourished in air, throats cheering hoarsely. Small in number, but great in prestige.

"Dad!" She jumped up and down, hysterically. "We're safe," she babbled.

"The old man, sure." He raised a hand, in signal. "Well, Sue girl, you can hate me now as long as you please."

He swayed weakly, and sank upon a pile of sod, to sit drooping. The stain on his shirt had been widening.

Out she ran, to wave and wave and laugh. On they swooped, the half-dozen, in cowman's garb, a grizzled veteran five lengths to the fore; clattered down, reined sharply, scanning with dust-rimmed, rapid eyes every object, and the spare, grizzled leader tumbled to earth. The girl rushed to his extended arms.

"Hurt, pettie? Did anybody hurt you?"

"No, not a bit."

He pressed her close; at arms' length scanned her.

"Thank God!"

As out of sudden thought he released her.

"Where's that skunk?" he demanded, and awaiting no answer strode bruskly through the doorway, towered gray, fierce, accusing, over the lack-luster sitting figure.

"You hound! You cowardly girl-stealer! Why couldn't you win her like a man? Thought to make away with her like with a cow or hoss, did you? I'd have trailed you till hell froze over. I ought to shoot yuh, but I'd rather leave yuh to the Injuns. They have proper treatment to try out the yellow in yuh. Stealing' my girl!"

"Dad!" The girl was in the breach between them. "Stop! You mustn't talk that way. I came of my own free will."

Thus she lied. Her father's mouth opened vainly; he gulped, shocked mute. The man struggled to his feet. His face flushed deeper.

"Here!" he challenged, with thick utterance. "Why do you say that?" Angry protest, doubt, and wild hope warred in his sick eyes.

She passed an arm about him supporting him, and defied the staring, listening group.

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ROTORUA REX

A THREE-PART STORY

Conclusion

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "The Hazard of the Hills," "The Pearl," etc.

CHAPTER XV

MOITAPU

THE CAÑON was a great fissure of volcanic origin, a jagged, uneven split in the crust of the island. At its head a great cataract roared down, blocking the way, the waters forming turbulent rapids that pre-empted most of the floor of the cañon and, during the rains—the king explained—made the place impassable. The season was not so long past as to greatly have diminished the torrent which had thrown up great piles of débris on either bank.

For the best part of a mile they climbed and dodged under and over tree trunks and boughs while the walls grew higher and the cañon narrowed. The roar of the waterfall at the head dwindled and subsided but ahead of them they could once more hear the thunder of waters. That the pursuit had not slackened they felt assured, but so thick was the perpetual screen of stranded trees through which they fought their way, that their foes might have gained upon them or given up the effort, for all they could sensibly determine.

It was a sick-looking little force, thought Loudon. The sergeant had been struck by a splinter or a deflected bullet which had temporarily rendered him unconscious and allowed Brewster, Edler and Griffin to rush the knife-edge while Bristol's men were temporarily without a leader, their own shooting being too uncertain to hold the crossing in the face of white men. The sergeant made no complaint but his wound evidently pained him.

The king had now thirty-one men all told and not one of them lacked a wound or some great bruise. Many of them were lame in arm or leg and many dripped blood as they went. Rotorua's chest was slashed with a cut that showed the white bone of his ribs and he had a great swelling behind one shoulder. But he laughed at the injuries.

Loudon had heard of the wonderful healing of flesh wounds by the islanders but he was thankful that, save for a twinge now and then where the savage had squeezed him, he was himself unscathed.

He had exactly twenty-four cartridges in his automatic and the extra clips. The king's men carried clubs and quarter-staffs—there were not a dozen spears among them. And behind them, followed the three Hawks and at least a hundred and fifty well-armed men, only exhausted by the chase, sound of limb and eager to avenge. Probably they had a good supply of cartridges.

The driftwood prevented them from using their rifles at present but they must sooner or later get within range. Somehow they had to be stopped to allow of time for embarkation and destruction of the canoes in which Toruki and his men had gone to Moitapu. Even if they got clear to sea, Henderson would be after them in the schooner. Brewster might have already sent back a messenger for the *Manawa* to head for Moitapu and catch them between two fires.

It seemed a hopeless situation despite the good fight they had made. There was no time for speech as they scrambled along. The girl disdained Loudon's aid

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but Mrs. Gower, impeded by a greater length of skirt, occasionally accepted his helping hand.

"If we ever get time to stop," gasped the widow, "I shall rip these things off to my knees. Are we ever going to get there?"

Rotorua, plunging along the bank like a river-horse, turned and grinned. He seemed to be getting a peculiar satisfaction out of Mrs. Gower's difficulties. But he nodded encouragingly to Serena.

"Bimeby," he said. "We come along place soon now."

The cañon dipped in a giant's staircase, the treads formed by waves of lava that apparently had once rolled down the rift much as the river that had supplanted them. Fortunately it was of the smooth variety but the going was exhausting and the atmosphere of the place that of a hothouse. The clothes of the whites were soon soaked with perspiration, the women's hair torn loose by the branches, faces and limbs whipped with twigs and scratched with thorny growths.

Always the roar of water sounded louder. The great rent divided a spur range and on either side of them the cliffs rose vertically for hundreds of feet.. Soon they were wading the impetuous torrent, holding to the stranded trees to maintain their footing in the groping rapids.

The driftwood began to disappear, lacking lodgment. They reached a ledge that paralleled the river which now usurped the entire bed of the cañon, flowing swift and dark and sunless. Ahead, the waters suddenly dropped, pouring through a great spout of rock into an abyss from which floated up a mist. The big trunk of a tree came surging along, reached the spout, tipped rootwards, lifting its still leafy crest and plunged.

The ledge that they were following shrank, and seemed to blend into the cliff near the top of the fall. The islanders were ahead, Rotorua coming between them and Serena, with Mrs. Gower following, then Loudon and Bristol last, all forced to single file by the narrowing ledge.

Rotorua stopped and grinned again, with an eye to Mrs. Gower. He was getting even for past snubbings though he showed no active ill-will and the widow had held the pace with a grim resolution that should have enforced his admiration, however reluctantly.

"There is some way around the cliff, king?" asked Loudon.

Rotorua shook his head.

"No way round. We go over."

"What?" gasped the widow. "Over?"

The king nodded. The first of his men had reached the end of the ledge and was stepping from it to a flat rock that fairly split the spout. The water went smoothly as oil over the brink for a width of about fifteen feet, the rock was polished smooth and showed a sloping hollow as wide as a saddle between pommel and cantle.

While Loudon and the two women watched, the native squatted carefully down, then sat in the hollow, tossed up his arms and, with a shout, projected himself on to the lip of the fall, disappearing with frightful rapidity. Another took his place and then another.

"That all right," said the king. "Pool he plenty deep. No hard. Plenty men help below. Go down foot first, hand up, you make um all right."

"I shall not go over that place," said Mrs. Gower. "You can give me that pistol, Mr. Loudon and I'll take my chances where I am, but wild horses could not drag me over that fall."

"Nonsense, aunt," said Serena. "We've often seen the islanders doing it in the pool at Waimotu. I've often wanted to do it myself. I'll confess I should like to know how deep it is, but if they can make it, we can. You can swim."

The widow shook her head.

"My skirts," she said.

Loudon had a wild vision of the widow parachuting down, falling like a wounded buzzard with her thin black shanks plumbing the abyss, and he shook with silent laughter despite the danger of the moment and its delay.

"I am going to tie mine," said the girl quietly, "with my belt. If you don't want to follow my lead, aunt, you'll have to stay behind and funk it. There's no other way. It's your turn, king."

Rotorua picked up her hand and patted it with his great brown paw.

"You plenty——plucky," he said. "No *pirikea*. I watch you come."

He stepped to the saddle rock, squatted, looked back and grinned and was gone. Serena stepped forward.

"Don't you want me to go first?" suggested Loudon. "I can help in the pool."

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"No thank you. Aunt is going next. Unless you *are* going to funk it, aunty?"

Mrs. Gower's cheeks hoisted dull crimson flags.

"Will you lend me your belt, Mr. Loudon?" she asked. "I am not at all certain whether I shall return it to you again. This method of procedure does not commend itself to me but I am not going to *funk* it, as my niece slangily suggests."

"It's not any different from a slide in a swimming-tank," replied the girl. "I'll help you fix the strap."

The two women got on the rock together and Serena stopped to fasten the belt about her aunt's skirt and ankles. Loudon had personal qualms about the plunge and their courage made him ashamed of himself. The widow raised her arms. The girl steadied her shoulders, gave her a little push and she was gone. Serena vanished within the next half minute.

"Look here, Bristol," said Loudon. "I've got to be the last. Those devils may show up any minute along the ledge and I've got the only gun."

"Hall right, sir, I'm hoff," said the sergeant. "Miss 'Argrave 'as my haddress hat 'ome. Harsk 'er to notify the old lydy, will you?"

"Afraid of your head? The plunge may help it. Keep steady as you can. It won't take a second or so."

"Hit h'aint my 'ead, sir. Hi cawn't swim."

He slid off as he uttered the words and Loudon prepared to take his place. He glanced back along the ledge. Figures were crawling through the last mass of driftwood. One of them was Brewster.

The next figure startled him. Apparently Toruki had come to life. The apparition was bewigged and hair-kirtled as the wizard had been and his face was set in a leer of demoniac ferocity. Brewster raised a rifle and fired as Loudon sat in the hollow slide and lifting his arms let himself go.

The water sucked him on and down. For a moment he hung in the face of the fall as if crucified, a vision of black cliffs shaping to a big bowl before him and, far below, black specks swimming and shouting in a pool. Then he rushed through clammy mist and plunged far down beneath the surface, striking out and up.

Hands grasped his arms and he was towed to shore. The sergeant was there, looking pale and faint and the girl and her aunt were wringing out their skirts. Mrs. Gower had torn off the lower breadths of hers and the ragged threads of a lavender silk petticoat showed under the dark margin of her abbreviated skirt.

"*Eyah!*" said the king. "What I tell you? Plenty good, no?"

"They are on the ledge," said Loudon. "You couldn't have killed Toruki, king. He's with them."

Rotorua looked startled for the moment, then shook his head and laughed.

"Toruki, plenty *mate*. This one no real Toruki. He wear um mask. Tindalo he pretend can be in two, three place one time. One man he take um beard all same Toruki, wear um mask so no one can tell, make kanaka think Toruki he along them, so they fight more better. That Rapara, he Toruki cousin. I think if he come along fall he lose his mask. Better we go along now more quick."

Loudon looked up at the fall. If he had a rifle and ammunition, he or Serena could have picked off the pursuers as they made the plunge. With his automatic he might account for several of them in the pool. But, if every cartridge told, that would still leave the odds five to one unless they killed the three Hawks and he shrewdly doubted whether Edler or Griffin would ever attempt the descent. Brewster might. The probabilities were that they would turn back and make for the schooner, leaving enough to guard the way.

That brought him to the question of how Toruki and his men had passed the falls on their way up. He asked the king, who explained that there was a trail, hard to climb and almost impossible to descend, that started from lower down the cañon and led in above the falls.

THEY were once more traveling swiftly down the cañon. As yet none of the pursuers had attempted the cataract. But, as the gorge forked and they started to leave the course of the river, taking the right hand branch, the sergeant touched Loudon's arm and he, in turn, that of the king. In rapid succession dark figures showed in the spout of the fall and shot down the water toboggan.

"They all kanaka," said Rotorua. "White man, they go back, I think. Better we hurry."

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The going was good and they made the best speed they were capable of. The king chose half a dozen men and sent them ahead to secure provisions and make ready the big canoe, destroying the rest. At a turn they suddenly saw and smelled the sea, crinkling far below them through a frame of greenery. Its savor was refreshing and they mended their pace, faint as they were with the fight and the lack of food.

"We *kai-kai* (eat) plenty bimeby," promised the king.

The fork they followed widened. Turf grew under their feet, brush and trees began to appear. They passed groves of breadfruit, bananas and wild oranges and presently they saw the plumy tops of the cocopalms back of Moitapu. Soon they looked down upon the taro-fields of the king's rainy-season house and picked out his roof thatch.

The lagoon lay emerald with brown patches where the coral neared the surface and marked the crooked channel to the peacock-blue ocean. There was no sight of the schooner. Behind them, their enemies were hidden by the increasing trees. They had not yet come to the up-trail that led back of the fall. There the pursuit might stay.

Serena and her aunt were nearing exhaustion, hardly able to keep a consistent gait. The vanguard of natives was out of sight when Rotorua gave a command to the nearest kanakas who speedily uptore the sturdy branches of some low-growing palms and made two litters into which Loudon forced the women.

The thing was done swiftly but, before they could get in motion again, a cluster of men broke through the forest at the far end of a glade and the sound of yelling came floating down to them.

"We come bridge pretty soon," said Rotorua. "Then we made um stop *lele* while, maybe."

The litter bearers broke into a trot. The sergeant was staggering along, white from the loss of blood, and Loudon felt his own knees acting as eccentrics.

They were traveling along a mountain path, half-way between crest and river bottom. Above them the trees grew thickly, below, the steep slope was covered with the slippery *piri* grass. A stream came cascading down to join the river and a bridge of logs, bound with *lianas* and deep sunk in the dirt at either end, crossed it. Once over, the litters and Bristol passed on and Rotorua's men essayed to uproot the bridge. Tug as they would, their strength was unequal to the task. The stream ran in a deep gorge and the removal of the crossing would give them much needed respite.

The head of the pursuit broke cover a hundred yards away, running swiftly. A bullet or two sang among them and one man dropped. With a stentorian bellow Rotorua ordered the rest aside and bent to a stubborn log. With a mighty heave he tore it from its socket of red dirt and let it fall. So with the next and then the last while Loudon held back the pursuit at fifty yards with a few shots from his last reserve.

They reached more level ground at last and soon were thudding heavily over the turf beneath a grove of coconuts. They caught up with the litters and pounded on across the dykes of the taro patches down to the beach.

The king's great canoe, a catamaran, with a big platform between the two hulls from which lifted a mast and great matting sail, was afloat. Men were piling the deck with provisions brought from a warehouse and hastily plucked from growing crops. Chickens were squawking and pigs squealing as they were flung aboard, bound with sinnet.

More men set to work using their clubs and rock boulders smashing in the sides of the canoes that had brought Toruki and his men. Rotorua shouted an order and two men brought out cans of kerosene from the house, pouring the contents over the broken craft, which were soon aflare. Twelve men climbed aboard either hull—the rest stood by the sail. With all aboard, the *motu* glided out from land through the tortuous channel as the outwitted natives came splashing through the taro and marshaled on the beach, yelling at the sight of their blazing canoes.

The mouths of the king's men were stuffed with snatched morsels of food as, sweep upon sweep, they wielded their paddles and drove the canoe for the open sea. On the platform the two women, Loudon and the sergeant drank young coconuts and ate bananas. Rotorua plucked the head from a chicken, skinned it warm and tore at the flesh.

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"Take one," he said to Loudon. "Blood plenty good. Bimeby we cook."

His mouth was smeared with the gore of the fowl and his great teeth ripped through the meat.

"*Eyah*, Laudoni!" he cried. "What I tell you, eh? Now we go along sea. Maybe we go New Mecklenburg. Then we come back along gunboat. Then I king one more time. I show you what I do along those fool kanaka!"

He waved the remnants of the chicken at the land and laughed as a bullet came skipping over the water.

The breeze caught them as they got out of the lee of the land and the great sail went up. Four men kept their paddles to steer and the rest ate eagerly what the king tossed them from the platform. They sailed east along the spouting reef, the mountainous island long and high to their right, the craft skimming the crested water, warm under the cloudless sun.

Tiny settlements nestled in deep cleft ravines but no smoke curled upwards. Rain-storms drenched the heights and squalls came rushing at them while they sped fast toward a palmtree cape that marked the eastern end of Hapai.

Once about the cape, they would run before the trade, with New Mecklenburg seventy odd miles away, a few scattering isles and atolls in between. The paddlers, hungry no more, broke into an old-time chant, changing parts of it to suit and honor the occasion.

Many were they, like the leaves of the forest,
We but a handful. O-hé!
Swiftly they gathered like clouds on the mountain,
Strong in their numbers. O-hé!
Mighty the waves that break on the pebbles,
Mighty and many. O-hé!
But the tide turns and, lo, there are the pebbles,
Still on the beaches! O-hé!
Great is the king and mighty Laudoni,
Fair are the women. O-hé!
Mighty the magic of Laudoni, wizard,
Mighty the . . . .

Serena, resting on the soft mats of the platform, lifted herself on her elbows and screened her eyes with her hands against the glare of the sun on the sea.

"Isn't that the schooner?" she asked.

The white sails of the *Manawa* were gliding behind the straggling palms of a low headland. The schooner cleared it, the sails narrowed as the sheets were hauled in and, reaching at her best gait, the *Manawa* took a bone in her teeth and started after them.

"A stern chase is apt to be a long one," said Loudon. Rotorua nodded.

"Bimeby my men paddle some more," he said. "I don' know, but I think maybe *lele* while storm come along."

They rounded the cape and the big sail bellied to the full strength of the wind. On the platform they shifted aft and the paddlers sat well back from the prows of the double canoes. The breeze blew from a clear sky behind them, but, ahead, banks of gray clouds, their upper edge shifting shape constantly, were piling higher and higher. A few miles ahead an atoll stood up like an etching.

The waves were running higher away from the land and seemed to have lost some of their transparency. A cone of rock, snowy with guano, reared inshore. About it thousands of birds were wheeling.

"Bimeby I think north wind fight along south wind," said Rotorua. Suppose bad for us, bad along schooner. They have to take um reef, we paddle all same like ——."

CHAPTER XVI

BETWEEN THE TRADES

THE SEASONAL shifting of winds that accompanies the change from the wet season to the dry was still to be expected and the high-peaked islands of the Magdeburg group made local disturbances, born of the varying temperatures of sea and mountainous land, frequent. As they sailed the sun seemed to lose its power, the warmth declined and the brilliance was veiled by a slight haze. The wave crests lost their crispness and the wind varied, dropping almost to a calm and then blustering in sudden rallies that sent the canoe scudding through seas that turned turbid and heavy as the afternoon wore on.

"It is like sailing through pea-soup," said Loudon. "I must have underestimated the speed of the schooner. She's overhauling us. Could we make better time with the paddles out, king? There are guns aboard and Henderson may turn loose his fourteen-pounder. It's been under canvas all trip but I know he has some shells aboard."

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"Not paddle now," said Rotorua. "Kanaka too much tired. Bimeby we paddle plenty. You see island?"

The gray clouds had turned to slate with a sulfurous yellow selvage. Loudon could just distinguish the rising crest of an island against their base.

"That Faiu. No one live there now along *mai-pake* (leprosy). One time every one *mate* there. Thirty mile from Hapai, maybe thirty-four, five, maybe. All right. Suppose schooner come too close we sail for Faiu, then I show you trick I speak along you one time."

The *Manawa* was coming up rapidly. Henderson had set a small square sail above his foresail and a great balloon jib swelled out over the bowsprit. She was bow-heavy with her forward gear but came on at tremendous speed, squatting low and plowing through the surge.

The sky-haze thickened and the waves grew scummy. The sun had turned from gold to brass. In the little calms a moaning sound came from the north. When the wind dropped the catamaran rocked violently and the sail flapped against the mast with protesting creaks of the cordage, halting in the valleys until the gale once more asserted itself.

Flame showed pale at the bows of the schooner. A smoke ring blew up and was torn to rags as something flew through the air and dropped short into the sea. Henderson had got his breech-loader into action.

"They are not bothering about gold or pearls so much now," said Loudon. "They know what will happen to them if we get to New Mecklenburg first. They are all liable for inciting an insurrection, aside from graver charges, and Brewster will take good care that Henderson makes the natives understand their position. They'll be within rifle range pretty soon."

Still Rotorua gave no order to his paddlers though the island was beginning to loom up ahead of them. He stood by the mast closely scanning the sea ahead. Another shell dropped short and little spurts of fire showed where the Hawks had opened up their rifles. From the pitching deck of the schooner, the marksmanship was not likely to be accurate but, as every minute brought the *Manawa* nearer, their position of target without means to reply was not a pleasant one.

A bullet ripped through the sail within a foot of the king's head but he did not budge. Suddenly he yelled to the paddlers and the men seized their implements and dug them frantically into the sea, which had suddenly turned to a maelstrom of cross currents. Through a quarter of a mile of this, they forged desperately and then the wind died suddenly for the space of five minutes. A fierce blast rushed from the north, setting them aback, succeeded by another brief calm and a return gust from astern. At the king's shout the sail was furled and the men stroked hard.

The schooner was in trouble. The big jib came down, then the square sail, but they made no attempt to reef and, with the renewed southerly wind, the *Manawa* held to her course. More bullets sang by and a shell soared above them with a whining *whee—ee!*

The after horizon was blotted out now, the brass sun had turned copper, the slate clouds sooty black. Lightning played behind their curtain, flaring blue to the zenith.

"Better we make Faiu," said Rotorua, clinging to the pitching mast.

"The schooner will head in there too," said Loudon. "We can't fight without guns."

"Schooner no make Faiu," said the king. "Look, what I tell you. *Eyah!*"

The *Manawa* had reached the patch that they had crossed with so much difficulty. Suddenly her bows pitched high and her sails shuddered. Another blast swept down from the north and the foremast broke off short, the sails huddling the deck and trailing into the sea.

"*Eyah!* One reef, one fathom-water-reef they hit," cried Rotorua exultantly. "No can tell in this sea. They no make Faiu. That my trick, Laudoni. While they shoot, they follow. Now,——,they drown."

The south wind had given up the fight. The norther had conquered and a gale blew from the rack of clouds. The catamaran was making heavy weather of it but the schooner was in desperate case. The seas leaped at her like a wolf-pack, smothering her in slavering foam, eager to glut themselves upon something tangible.

The back muscles of the paddlers stood out in bunches as they forged toward Faiu, sticking up like a negro's thumb against the

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blackness of the sky. Loudon crept toward the mast and reared himself erect. The schooner was hard and fast. But the Hawks were not beaten yet. From her stern two whale-boats lowered crowded with men, showing on the crests with frantic oars, lost in the valleys but making slowly for the land.

Blood lust and lust of gold were merged now in a common desire for safety. There was no more shooting—catamaran and whale-boats fought foot by foot for the haven in the teeth of the augmenting hurricane.

The wind grew fickle, striking from northeast to northwest in sudden blows like those of a boxer. The seas increased in volume and the catamaran headed to the northwest, fighting a strong current that threatened to carry them far to the east of Faiu. The whale-boats followed their course, keeping the distance fairly even.

The waves ran criss-cross, lunging up beneath the platform and lifting the whole structure. The lee of the island seemed small protection. It was rapidly growing dark and it seemed as if the canoe must be torn asunder. They could no longer see the following boats. Ahead the combers rose and, beyond them, they could dimly see the spouting of the reef.

The lightning aided them. Once the pall of the clouds was ripped by a jagged fork that preceded a clap of thunder that seemed to flatten the sea. Rotorua's form was a blurred bulk in the murk as he hung to the mast, searching for entrance. Another stroke of lightning came and showed the thumb-like mountain, cleft, as it appeared, in the nail.

Loudon could see no distinction in the line of tumultuous foam that rose from the reef but the king bellowed and the paddlers spaded their way through the inky water with renewed vigor, breakers rolling up behind them, sensed rather than seen, hissing through the tumult of the gale and sending them lurching on while the men dug at the foaming wash.

"We all right now," cried the king.

Spume wraiths rose high to right and left as they swept through the reef-gate. Then a blind billow, upreared from the welter behind them, chased and caught them, spun them sideways and rolled over them, pounding them below the surface.

Loudon struck out blindly, suffocating, pressed down by tons of water, rolling powerless, directionless in the tow. His hand struck cloth and he clutched it as he came up in comparatively smooth water and took great breaths of relief. Blobs of heads were bobbing about him.

A wave lifted him and the burden he had grasped and swept them headlong shoreward, stranding him in sand that sucked and shifted under his feet as he fought the backwater, doggedly dragging at the heavy thing that held him back. Some one lunged splashing toward him and a great hand caught his arm below the shoulder, hauling him to a sloping beach where he dropped, still clinging to the clothes of Serena.

A voice boomed through the pound and rush of the gale.

"*Eyah*, Laudoni! We make Faiu all right."

The wind thrashed through the shore palms and harried the scrub as they crawled up the coral sand to low cliffs where they sank in temporary respite. Above them boughs whipped, bowed and tossed and the gale roared over all. Loudon bent over Serena. She sighed as he raised her head on his arm. By some miracle her lungs were clear of water.

THERE were only seven forms stretched out on the sand. The canoe was gone. The platform, rent from the hulls, must have crushed the paddlers. One native lay writhing with a broken leg. Beyond him was a limp mass of wet clothes. It was Mrs. Gower, face downwards, clutching the sand and reiterating Serena's name. The sergeant lay next to Rotorua asprawl on his back senseless but breathing. One more kanaka gibbered with fright and Rotorua kicked at him.

"*Kuri-kuri* (silence) coward!" he called. "Laudoni, storm come along more bad bimeby. Hurricane, I think. Better we go away from beach, from tree. Maybe I can find some cave."

Lightning spattered the sand with a sudden lacework of black and lavender. Loudon thought he glimpsed a tattered banner of canvas out at sea where the schooner had struck. The whale-boats were nowhere to be seen. Inevitably they must have gone down with all hands, he thought. The girl sighed again.

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"We've got to find safety somewhere," he called in her ear. "Can you walk?"

"I can try," she said faintly.

Loudon got to his knees and managed to lift her in his arms. She slid an arm about his neck. As he struggled to his feet she suddenly subsided heavily into unconsciousness. He could feel the soft curves of her as she breathed against his chest and he turned to the king for directions. Rotorua had heaved the feebly protesting scarecrow of Mrs. Gower into his embrace.

"Set me down, king," she said.

"No. You be quiet. We got to go quick."

The man with the broken leg shrieked for help. On the king's order the other native drew his screaming fellow into a niche in the cliff and banked him about with sand.

"Bimeby we come back," said Rotorua. "Now we go——quick."

The kanaka tugged at Bristol's limp figure and slung it across his shoulders and the little procession, three carrying and three carried, stumblingly followed the king along the beach to where a little stream came spuming down a glen. The wind rushed at them and beat them back. A lightning glare displayed the course of the ravine, thickly furred with trees contorted under the scourge of the gale.

"No good," said Rotorua. "Bimeby no wind. Then plenty too much. We wait. Then we get under tree. Try to reach cave in hill."

They backed into a hollow of the slope and the men set down their burdens. Mrs. Gower, once more upon her feet, edged away from the king then turned to him.

"Rotorua, you saved my life," she said. "Back there in the lagoon. I shall not forget it."

The king grunted.

"That all right," he said ungraciously. "Me, I thought it was Missy Hargrave."

Save for the electric display, it was dark as midnight, though Loudon knew that the sun must be somewhere above the horizon. Not a drop of rain had fallen. Above the swish and grate of boughs the ocean roared and bellowed like a herd of famishing jungle-beasts. One moment would show the lagoon white with foam, covered with long rollers that had leaped the reef and raced shoreward to beat and boom upon the sands, drumming in the advance of the spouting seas.

Loudon was crouching, the girl's head in his lap, gazing seaward. Like the suddenly extinguished flame of a candle the wind ceased—abruptly—utterly. The sea's artillery still thundered, striving to force a breach in the reef but the gale was as suddenly mute as if a giant screen had been stretched across its path.

It was the truce before the main attack. Instantly the king broke to the open glen, calling on them to follow. The widow was behind him and Loudon once more gathered up the girl while the native picked up the still inanimate sergeant. It was like running in a vacuum. To the south the cloud wrack rolled up like a curtain, disclosing the embers of a dying sunset and then dropped down again, leaving a vague twilight.

North, above the mountains, the sky was swirling in dense purple-black masses. Great peals of thunder sounded from behind it, and through it the lightning played fitfully. The trees had sprung upright like bows released from the string, trembling as they sought for equilibrium. It was hard to breathe as they labored on and plunged into a palm grove, still following the little brook. The air was strangely hot and oppressive.

The girl began to struggle in Loudon's arms and he set her down.

"I am all right now," she said. "Thank you, so much."

Loudon was too glad to hear her speak to notice the conventionality of her remark. He was grateful too for the relief from her burden, though this was a subconscious thought.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"There is a hurricane coming, the king thinks. We are trying to reach some caves in the hills."

It was getting black again and they could barely dodge the tree trunks as they fled through the grove. A great sigh sounded, seeming to come from the heart of the airless void. It passed through the branches above them and a sudden shower of nuts descended.

"Hurry!" cried the king.

He appeared to have a certain purpose of direction and led them out of the grove up the steeper part of the glen on to a mountain spur. The core of the island, the great

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thumb they had seen at sea, leaped into view, backed by a coppery-pink slice of sky across which incessant lightning writhed like fiery serpents. A rocky pinnacle confronted them with the form of the king beside it, beckoning.

There was a cave at the base of the pillar, facing seaward, and into it they dived like hunted rabbits. The lightning display had shifted to the ocean, showing rank upon rank of spouting waves advancing, their manes blown backwards, shouldering one upon the other.

With the steady roar of a thousand blast furnaces the hurricane surged down, advancing at incredible speed, plucking at the island as if it would tear it deep-rooted from its base. Below them the wood divided. In the intermittent light they saw tree-crowns flying like paper ashes above a fire.

Then absolute blackness shut down upon the world. The noise of the wild water, the crashing of trees, mingled with the shout of the wind into a melodic tone that stupefied them with its primal chords, the war-chant of the elements. Hour after hour went by with the fury unabated—but it soon proved a slumber song to the worn-out survivors.

Loudon awoke, sweat-drenched from a nightmare of continuous effort against some unformed horror. A shaft of sunrise penetrated the cave, showing the pitted roof and half the ragged entrance. He rose and went to the mouth of the shelter. The sea was still tossing turbulently and the reef smoked with the spume of the battering billows but the sky was radiant with rose and purple clouds serene on an arch that blended from tender green to blue.

The schooner had utterly vanished and the coastline was a scene of devastation. Trees lay prone, piled one upon another like river logs in a jam. The shore-palms had disappeared, the brush was piled up in heaps. From the ruin, uptorn roots projected with here and there the raw limbs of a shattered banyan or *roa*.

Hardly a tree was left standing. The reef was piled with their trunks, others tossed seaward on the ebb. The island had been demolished as if the toy forest of a child's model had been crushed with the palm of a giant hand. It was strangely silent. The birds had deserted the place, their nests scattered, blown to sea, drowned, many of them. The air held a spicy tang of the bruised foliage, tonic, refreshing. He turned back to the interior of the cave.

Bristol lay upon his face, his shoulders lifting in even sleep. Mrs. Gower snored stertorously beside the girl whose head was pillowed on her arm, her hair tumbled about her shoulders. And those were all. The native had disappeared. Rotorua was gone.

CHAPTER XVII

THE COLUMN OF SMOKE

LOUDON hesitated before he awakened the sergeant. His first thought was that Rotorua had returned to the beach for the man whose leg had been broken. It would take a long time to penetrate the tangle of wreckage and, if the rest shared his sensations, they would awaken ravenous. There would be nuts in plenty and easily available, perhaps uncrushed fruits and, in the stream, crayfish and mullet.

The lagoon might be unfishable for awhile. Turtles would not have laid their eggs in storm-time. But the king might bring back food and Bristol, wounded as he was, needed all the sleep he could get. The women he would not wake until he had some sort of a breakfast for them. He had matches with him in a water-tight case and a dozen shots for his automatic.

While the fate of the men from the schooner was undecided—though there seemed small chance of their survival—he did not care to leave the cave. A little way beneath him some guava brush had been ripped from the shallow soil and he descended and picked a lot of the fruit, white-pulped and pink, luscious but not satisfying. These he munched while the rest slumbered, pondering their situation.

Faiu, according to the king, was roughly half the distance to New Mecklenburg. Perhaps the latter could be seen from the summit. Faiu was practically *tapu* in the memory of the plague. It was not likely to be visited. Toruki had sent envoys to the other islets of Rotorua's sovereignty. What effect his death would have upon the determination of the inhabitants to support the attempted revolution was hard to determine. The king would be considered drowned in the hurricane with the whites of both sides, a theory that would

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strengthen when the schooner failed to return.

Hapai itself might have been devastated. The radius of the storm might have included all the Magdeburg group. The islanders would be either in a state of terror, or, believing themselves rulerless, would revert to savagery. Meanwhile they were marooned on Faiu. A raft might ultimately be made but navigation in those latitudes was a tricky thing, where cross-currents often prevented a well-equipped sailing-vessel from making haven.

They had encountered one such vagrant stream and only the strenuous efforts of twenty-four paddlers had enabled them to fight it successfully. Any craft that they might contrive without tools would be more than likely swept away from its intended course and stranded upon a shore even less hospitable than that of Faiu.

He was feeling fairly fit but irresistibly drowsy in the sun and, in full sympathy with the others in the cave, he nodded off.

He came back to wakefulness with a start. Some one was tapping on his shoulder—his forehead had been pillowed in his palms, his elbows on his knees. The sun had entirely shifted from the cave-mouth and was was well up the sky.

"Good-morning, Mr. Loudon," said the girl as he rose to his feet, conscious of blinking eyes, wrinkled, dirty, blood-stained clothes and a bristly chin.

Serena Hargrave's trim suit had been preserved by some feminine alchemy in a state that, beside his attire, was comparatively impeccable. Her pale gold hair was smoothly coiled, his own was sticking up all over his poll. And her face, lacking color, circled about the eyes with the tender blue of snow shadows, was smooth as satin.

It was not a fair deal, Loudon decided, that made a razor the guardian of a man's respectability in the stages between beard and bristle. The girl's appearance made him feel uneasily uncouth, a sort of *Caliban* to her *Miranda*, who had been caught sleeping at his post.

"How long have you been up?" she went on. "I am simply ravenous and so is aunt. I wonder if you could manage some breakfast for us. You are so resourceful. Or has the king gone after some? I am afraid Bristol is going to be pretty sick—his head seems to hurt him, so much so that he is not entirely himself. I wonder if there is another cave where he can be made more comfortable. This is very hot."

Loudon felt hot himself, but the degrees were those of temperament rather than temperature.

"I'll see what I can do," he said a bit stiffly. "I don't want to go out of sight of the cave just yet. The king was not in the cave at daybreak. I rather expected him back before this with his man. But I'll scour up something to eat."

I may be developing a condition of chronic grouch, he told himself as he clambered down toward the broken trees. The cave overlooked the head of a glen that he imagined to be the same one up whch they had come the night before. A thready waterfall dropped over rocky ledges and he made his way toward the basin of its foot-pool continuing his soliloquy.

It may be only her Britticism and the fact that she has always been what is known as a superior, but that quietly bossy way of hers grates on my nerves at times. I wonder who did the driving, she or her father. She's a good deal of a beauty and once in a while she seems to be all girl, and the next minute she's all suffragy. I suppose in her eyes I'm a commoner. I was going to get her breakfast, naturally, and I'd have looked out for the sergeant but I wonder if she'd ever shed that shell of hers. The memory of her arm about his neck and the lithe curves of her figure on his breast confused his analysis of her. I wonder, he thought . . . Hello, what's that?

"That" was a weird bird that fluttered broken-winged through the demolished bushes. Loudon plunged after it and secured it. It was about the size of a hen turkey, a helmet-like protuberance on the back of its head which, with its neck, was glossy and red as sealing-wax, bare of feathers. The plumage was glossy-black above and rosy-white beneath, the tail short and the feet enormous; one of the mysterious megapods of the Melanesian-Australasian region.

"With that head and feet you look like a ghoul," said Loudon. "With them off you will look like a tempting variety of chicken. Maybe you'll taste as good as you look."

He removed the offending members, skinned the game and cleaned it, husked the coconuts of a fallen palm and gathered a variety of fruit. Returning to the cave

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he made a fire, broiled the megapod, dissected it and announced breakfast.

The sergeant remained in a state of coma and Loudon returned to the spring with the emptied coconut shells, bringing them back full of cool water. The girl had improvised some cloths and Mrs. Gower applied them wet to Bristol's wounded head.

The meal had brought the scarlet back to the girl's lips and a faint glow to her cheeks.

"You are really a wonderfully resourceful person, Mr. Loudon," she said. "I can't imagine what we should have done without you. Are all Americans as universally competent?"

"Some of us. We are a nation of handymen in the mass. We lack pedigrees but then, the country is young. And we have our undesirables. I am wondering whether the specimens of them who stirred up this business are alive and on the island. I should feel easier if I were sure they were not. And Rotorua ought to be back by now, even if they are bringing up the wounded man from the beach."

"Was there some one hurt? Are we the only survivors of our party? I suppose the canoe was smashed?"

"Without doubt."

He told her what she had missed of the happenings of the night and his conjectures as to their general situation.

"I am afraid the sergeant is in bad shape," he said. "Something may have fractured his skull, bullet or splinter. He needs a surgeon."

"What is the first thing to be done?"

It was the first time she had directly appealed to him as a leader and he was conscious of a tiny glow of triumph and pleasure.

"I think we ought to make the rounds," he said. "First to the beach to see if we can trace the king and then to the top of the island for a general outlook. It isn't a very large one from what I could make out of it in the storm. We may catch a glimpse of New Mecklenburg."

She jumped up.

"Let us go. Aunt will stay with Bristol if you can get some more water. Is your pistol still in order? We could leave that with her. Bristol's revolver is empty."

The automatic still had a coating of grease that had preserved it during the wreck and Loudon gave it to Mrs. Gower who returned it.

"I have my own 'popgun,' as you call it," she said. "It seems to be effective at short range. After you go out I should think you could cover up the front of the cave with green brushwood and make it safe enough. The king knows its location, I presume, because he has been here before. The others —if there are any others of the insurgents— probably do not. If any of the wretches are alive you are more likely to run on to them than they are liable to find this cave. Bristol and I will do very nicely, thank you. Take good care of Serena, Mr. Loudon."

THERE was a distinctly affable note in the widow's voice and Loudon felt that some of the imaginary barriers of caste between the American consular and the British diplomatic services had been voluntarily removed. He had a warming affection for the widow's pluck and will-whipped stamina.

"Your aunt is a remarkable woman," he said to the girl as they successfully masked the entrance to the cave and started beachward.

"She comes of a remarkable family." Serena spoke proudly. "Her father, my grandfather, held back the Hindoo cavalry at Meerut with a handful during the mutiny. His brother entered Khartum with Kitchener. There were five V. C.'s in the family before this war. There are eleven now. The motto of the Hargraves is, 'Faith with Honor.' There has never been a Hargrave who has failed to live up to it, through six centuries."

"Some record," said Loudon. "I can't go back as far as that myself. My great-grandfather lived in Massachusetts when the American Colonies had their misunderstanding with Great Britain. While the rest were arguing he went home and cleaned his gun and he was the first to turn out when the scrap started. That is all the fighting record we have except in the Civil War. My father started in that as a drummer-boy and came out a captain. I volunteered for the Spanish-American mix-up but I only got as far as Tampa. We are shy of crest and mottoes except a general subscription to the great American slogan."

"What is that?"

"Do it now," laughed Loudon. "I think we had better follow the ridge as far as we can."

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The girl assented with a little sigh. Loudon wondered whether her little history of the Hargraves had been delivered with any purpose to check presumption in the bud. It is seldom that a red-blooded man is in the intimate company of as prepossessing a girl as Serena Hargrave under such ripening circumstances as Loudon had been without Nature's prime motive, sex, prompting mating suggestions.

He glanced at her as she strode springily along, a fitting descendant of a line of heroes, and wondered whether she would be as comfortable to live with as she was to look at. One thing seemed certain, that unless her mate assumed an early mastery, which he would find no easy task to establish and maintain, he would soon become a mere appendage to the House of Hargrave, a commoner-consort.

But Loudon's views had not yet ascended the foothills of Inclination, events had whirled too rapidly for the self-communion that is the soil of Love, and as yet he had experienced no Excelsior urge to storm the mountain fastnesses of the girl's affections. But—meanwhile—it was very pleasant to share adventures with so pally a companion.

Keeping to rocky ledges they got down to the beach at last. The tide was ebbing. Fragments of boatwork lay stranded or swashed about in the lace of the once more quiet lagoon. Some of these were indubitably the remnants of the raft, others, painted white, showed that one whaleboat, at least, had been torn asunder. The tide-swept sand was clear of footprints. The lagoon was at its lowest. If Rotorua and his follower had passed they must have left some trace.

Suddenly Loudon stopped.

"Miss Hargrave, there is something ahead of us that I want to look at. You need not come."

"A drowned man?"

"Yes. Perhaps there will be more than one. They may be either white or brown. Frankly, I should be relieved if we discovered the Hawks among them."

"The Hawks?"

He explained the simile.

"Brewster is the one most to be feared," he said. "Edler and Griffin are ordinary plunderers, the skipper and his supercargo are too crafty to risk overmuch, but the gambler has an infernal sort of cleverness tacked on to a purpose that is not easily given up. The king caught him at cheating, he would like to make a clean-up of the gold and pearls he fancies he can get possession of through you.

"He is the type that would stop short of nothing for either loot or revenge, I fancy, and I have a lingering hunch that somehow or other he is not cleared from our horizon yet. Toruki was a brutal savage but I do not think there would be much choice between your falling into hands like his—or into Brewster's."

The girl nodded.

"I am not afraid of him, living or dead," she said. "Thank you for your frankness. I will stay here while you go ahead."

She seated herself on a clump of coral while Loudon ranged the crescent of the beach. Masses of storm-cropped verdure encumbered it and, entangled beneath them, crumpled in rock-crevices and slumped in tide-pools, he counted eleven corpses. Three of them he knew for the crew of the schooner, the others might have been either Toruki's or the king's men. Doubtless they constituted but a remnant of the toll taken by the storm. But there were no white men among them. Other beaches might hold a more plentiful sea-harvest. He returned to the girl.

"I shall let the high-tide play grave-digger," he said as he answered her questioning gaze. "I may have to bury some later. Let us go up to the cliff. It was about here that we made the shore."

"There is supper in this pool," she said. "Shall we take it now?"

A big fish shaped like a pickerel had been left in a basin of the rocks. Loudon scooped it out, snapping viciously, and it flapped on the sand until he killed it with a blow from a fragment of driftwood and wrapped it in leaves, placing it in the shade, to take on later.

They explored the crevices of the cliff from one horn of the beach to where the glen broke its symmetry but found no sign of the broken-legged native. If he had been carried off there were no tell-tale footprints. It was more than probable that a high-driven tide had reached him and swept him out to join the remainder kept by the sea.

Where the glen merged with the beach, Loudon had seen mangroves bearing sea-fruit, oysters left high between tides. He plucked a full meal of these for both of

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them, washed down by coconut milk before they started upon their attempt to top the island. They kept to the ridge by which they had descended and he made a side trip to the cave to deposit the fish. Outside the screen of boughs he laughed. The cavern was entirely hidden but an invader needed no sesame. Inside, the sergeant and Mrs. Gower were snoring in an off-key duet. As he pushed aside the boughs the widow sat upright, clutching her pistol.

"Only the fishman," said Loudon, diplomatically ignoring the fact that she had been asleep. "We are going on to the top of the island."

"Any signs of the king?"

"No."

He told her of the discovery of the bodies.

"Rotorua is loyal," she declared. "Something has happened to him. He has been captured by somebody. We are not alone on this island, I am sure of it. You two must be careful."

Loudon deposited on the ground some oysters he had brought with him.

"Perhaps we had better not go," he said. "But there is nothing to be gained by inaction. How is the sergeant?"

"A little better. Where have you left Serena? Put the boughs back and go on. I shall keep *perdu* until you come back."

"The sergeant snores rather audibly from outside," suggested Loudon.

She looked at him with a twinkle that was half humor, half suspicion, and sniffed.

"Then we shall both have to stay awake. They will not find us napping, if they do chance to discover us. You are a very effective young man, Mr. Loudon. Now go along back to Serena."

IT WAS a hard, hot trail to the cleft in the thumb but they found a patch of forest that had been protected fairly well by the peak and gratefully traveled in its shade until they reached the base of the weather-worn core of the island.

Loudon picked out a traverse to the cleft and they made it antwise, blown and bruised but standing at last in a ragged rift scarred by ancient fires. From there, a crack gave them a chance to hitch themselves to the tip of the eastern side of the cleft, lying flat to avoid being blown away by the thrust of the trade, once again blowing steady and strong from the south. They wriggled to the lee of a bump of rock and got to their feet.

The island lay beneath them, its shoreline an irregular ring, like a biscuit that had been munched at the edges. The blue sea seemed from the height a stretch of grosgrain silk. Trees were heaped up everywhere, the broken forest lay in swathes. Save for Mrs. Gower and the sergeant below in the cave, they seemed to be alone on the island. To the extreme east the reef, marked by the narrow edging of surf, stopped where it joined a headland, was a gap that was the entrance to a small bay, shaped, with its curving channel, like a comma, partly surrounded by the eroded walls of a subsidiary crater.

"That would have been a good landing," said Loudon. "But I suppose the king was afraid to risk getting too far east on account of the current."

"Where do you suppose he can be? I am sure he hasn't deserted us."

"If he was alone I might think some accident had happened," answered Loudon. "But both of them would hardly have got into trouble. It's a mystery to me, Miss Hargrave and I don't like it. He was a great old standby."

" 'Mighty eater and smiter,' " quoted the girl. "I always liked him. He was a real king."

"Is yet, I hope. Look north. I think that must be New Mecklenburg. Do you see where it lies like the blue silhouette of a camel lying down?"

"I see it. Only thirty-five miles away, you said. Surely we can manage to cross it. Bristol will die, I am afraid, unless his skull is trephined."

"We'll tackle it somehow. But we haven't anything bigger than a clasp-knife for a tool. We might burn out a hardwood tree and fix outriggers with pegs and bark rope and I imagine we can achieve some sort of a sail but it will be a crazy craft to sail and steer and I am afraid of the currents.

"Do you see that mass of wreckage moving east and west now? We may have to cross several of those. But we must manage it. It will be better than trying to get back to Hapai, not knowing how we stand with the islanders. We might risk it with Rotorua, but as things stand, the distance is equal and the thing to do is to get in touch with the authorities. The gold and pearls are still safe."

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"How long will it take to make a canoe?"

The girl spoke wistfully and Loudon saw clearly in the broad day how the strain had told upon her.

"Aunt and I can help you," she continued. "We could weave a matting sail, I fancy, and make the bark cordage. Look!"

She seized him by the arm and pointed to the head of the comma-shaped baylet.

A thin thread of smoke stole upward, wavered and died.

"That has got to be investigated," said Loudon. "It may be a distress signal from the king or it may be our friends from the schooner. We can't leave it in doubt. Will you go back to the cave?"

She flashed an indignant look at him.

"You know very well that I will not. That valley reaches the place. The bay-crater forms at the end of the southern spur. I am not any more tired than you are. Which way shall we go down. Through the cleft?"

Faiu was barely three miles in widest diameter and the thumb, approximately in its center, was the hub for a series of deeply eroded gorges radiating like spokes to the tire of the reef. It took two hours before they cautiously crept along the ridge that dominated the little crater and looked into the tiny bay from which they had glimpsed the rising smoke. It seemed absolutely deserted. During the afternoon the birds had been slowly returning to the island, wheeling above their ruined groves with plaintive cries. A flock of plover was wading along the tide-rim.

"They wouldn't be there if there was any one about," said the girl. "It is safe to go down."

Loudon saw that there was a cartridge in the breech of his pistol before they started the descent. There was plenty of cover for an unseen approach and they emerged on the sand from a jumble of pandanus. It had been impossible to accurately locate the smoke but it had seemed to come from beach level and they made a careful search.

The sun was beginning to drop behind the central peak and the beach was in shadow when they reluctantly decided to return, beginning to fancy that they had not seen the thin thread of blue at all. The tide had turned, making it risky for them to return by the beach. The girl was afraid that her aunt would become over-anxious.

They entered the pandanus scrub to regain the ridge and broke through into a natural clearing. The soil was sandy. The body of a native lay beside the ashes of a tiny fire. They hurried toward where it lay, face downward. Between the shoulders a gash showed where the life had been let out. Loudon gently turned the limp figure upward and started back with an exclamation.

"Do you know him?" asked Serena.

"Yes. It is the man who handled the sheet of the sail on the canoe. The same one who was with us in the cave with the king!"

It was the verge of dark when they finally reached the cave, unmolested but tired out and baffled with the mystery that seemed brooding on the island.

"I hope," said Serena, "that aunt has cooked the fish and I am grateful that there will be no dishes left to wash."

She essayed to laugh but the effort was a mockery and she staggered a little. Loudon steadied her. Instinctively he had avoided helping her hitherto but now she turned a grateful face to his.

"Thank you ever so much. You are awfully good to me and I don't always deserve it. My God!"

Loudon echoed her. The brush was torn from the front of the cave and its opening loomed black and ominous. Automatic in hand, Loudon entered. The place was empty. As he came out, his face grim, Serena read its expression and, with a little sigh, crumpled at his feet as the sun dipped and darkness rushed down from the peak.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. GOWER'S ADVENTURE

LOUDON stood above the girl, his hand gripped upon his pistol until his flesh welded with the pattern on the steel. Through the dusk he felt the slow on-creep of something sinister, intangible. With Serena Hargrave he had covered half the island since overlooking it from the thumb. They had found twelve dead men, eleven drowned and one killed by a stab in the back. The king had disappeared. So had the man with the broken leg and now Mrs. Gower and the wounded sergeant had vanished.

There was only one answer. The Hawks

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had managed to land in safety and were bent upon the destruction of those who knew too much. Information from Miss Hargrave to the British authorities would bring speedy vengeance on the trail of the adventurers. Without the schooner they could not hope to escape. They were doomed to penal servitude at the least, possibly the gallows, in the rigid administration of bi-national affairs.

They were desperate men now, Hawks no longer, but rats penned in a corner. Edler and Griffin were of coarse type, the gambler might hold refinements, but they would be refinements of cruelty. If they could torture from either or both of the women the whereabouts of the treasure, they would make shift to secure it either now or later, making their escape from the island in some such craft as Loudon himself had planned and leaving no witnesses behind them.

Death, such as he and the sergeant might meet, would be a little thing, he felt, compared with what might happen to the girl at the hands of Brewster. He would dominate the others, Loudon felt assured, and prayed for the chance to kill at least the gambler before they closed in upon them.

Of the odds he could form no conception. If their foes had managed to make a landing in the little bay it was possible that they had saved their arms. The wound in the back of the king's man seemed to have been made by a spear, rather than a knife. They had seen the remnants of one boat, at least, but the schooner carried four and all of them might have been eventually launched.

Loudon tried desperately to pierce the gloom through which, to his quickened imagination, foes were creeping up on every hand and devoutly wished that the king were by his side. The cave was the only place of retreat. It was practically certain that the Hawks would anticipate their ultimate return; the wonder was that they had not been waiting for them in ambush.

Unless—unless Mrs. Gower had given out the idea that she and the sergeant were the only survivors to gain time or give them a better chance of escape.

At night, even if Serena could travel, they could make no attempt to find and rescue her aunt and Bristol. Progress through the devastated forest would be almost impossible even if they knew in what direction to search.

While his thoughts ran fast he had been chafing the hands of Serena. Now he fumbled with the collar of her waist but found it loose. Her supple body was unstayed. But her hands were cold as ice, cold as her face. He could faintly feel a fluttering pulse and he picked her up and groped his way into the cave. It angled sharply a little way in, forming an inner chamber where the two women had slept and he decided to light a fire, for the sake of the girl. It could be fairly well hidden and, since he dared not leave her to go to the glen for water, it was the only thing he could do. The full flow of life that had so wonderfully sustained her spirit and action was very low.

He carried her back and laid her gently on the sand. Then he found some branches left over from the first fire he had made at the entrance and piled them craftily, lighting them behind a screen made of his coat stretched over a bough, that he brought inside. He unlaced her shooting-boots and chafed her slender, high-arched feet, holding them close to the glow. It seemed an hour before they turned from ivory to flesh once more and she sighed, drew up her arms to the elbows and raised herself on them, looking wonderingly at him.

He had dropped her feet to the sand. She sat up and toasted them without comment on their bareness while she plied him with questions.

"I can't understand why they were not waiting for us," he concluded. "It's a lucky respite, for now we can crawl out of this and tuck ourselves away until it's light enough to do something. If we get up the mountain a way we may be able to see their camp-fire. We can't stay here."

"I don't agree with you. If they didn't lay in wait for us it is simply because they haven't found the place at all. That's logic. Aunt has gone somewhere with Bristol. And she would have been back here if she had not been prevented."

"She couldn't have carried Bristol."

"She could, if she made her mind up to it. He's probably better. But you undervalue aunt's powers."

"I don't think I do. But how are we going to find her?"

"She won't have gone far away. And I can find her as soon as I get my boots on."

Loudon went to the front of the cave, thankful for the girl's optimism for her own

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sake and trying to share it. The sky was brilliant with stars giving light enough for travel over the clearer places. He could neither hear nor see anything suspicious. The air was redolent with crushed bush spice and the boom of the reef crooned faintly upward. The girl came to his side.

"Let us try the ridge," she said.

"Don't expose yourself against the stars," he warned. "There is no sign of trouble, but some one killed that man and it wasn't the king."

They crouched down on the edge of the ridge. The girl pursed up her mouth and sent out a wailing call—

"Oo-o-au! Oo-o-au!"

Almost instantly it was repeated from the air above them. Looking up, Loudon saw a bird with wide-spread wings, soaring in erratic flight. The girl laughed softly.

"My imitation is flattered. That is a night-petrel. I have often used their cry for a signal when we have been out in the woods. We'll have to wait a minute."

The bird wheeled above them, sounding the call in the hope of locating a mate and then disappeared peakward. The girl repeated her signal a dozen times and then there came an answer, faint as an echo from some recess higher up the mountain. They traced their way by call and recall until the latter came definitely from a spot directly below them on the eastern side of the ridge.

During their earlier trip they had noticed many sub-cañons that ran from the main spur like ribs from a backbone. One of these now showed in a V of deep shadow. Climbing down, they caught the tinkle of water and saw its faint shine in the starlight where it sprang from a ledge and fell to the jumble of storm-broken trees that apparently filled the defile with débris.

"Oo-o-au! Oo--o-au!

The reply broke through the lattice of tumbled boughs. A tiny light showed occasionally as it moved under the trees and gradually worked upward.

Then it appeared free of the jungle, illuminating the lean figure of Mrs. Gower.

"Serena?" she challenged.

"And Mr. Loudon."

"Thank Heaven. Come down carefully. Now, follow me. We'll have to risk the torch."

She led the way, lighting fresh torches of dried palm branches as the one she held aloft burned down. The gorge had been filled with a dense growth of *tutui* trees and the stout trunks had resisted the hurricane, upholding the ruin of their broken tops like a thatch. There were evidences of an old and once well-beaten trail as they made their way toward the fall, the widow stalking ahead rapidly without a word.

In an opening close to where the water came sprinkling down to a pool and the ravine wedged itself into the parent ridge, they passed the ruins of a house with grass walls and roof, showing the lashed framework and enclosed by a palisade. Rudely carven images on the heads of stakes stood about at all angles, their leering faces and shell-eyes catching the red gleam of the flambeau.

The house was built against the cliff and Mrs. Gower piloted them between the savage pantheon of leering gods to its interior. There, a squat idol had slumped forward on its pedestal. She disappeared beyond it and they trailed her into a tunnel of rough lava.

The floor had been artificially smoothed and laid with flat blocks of stone. It ran back some hundred feet into the mountain and, at the end of the corridor, a fire was burning, its smoke disappearing through a crack in the roof that supplied the draft. On either side of the passage were entrances to rock-chambers. These showed signs of mancraft in the steps that led to some of them.

THE widow waved a hand to those on her right.

"Full of old bones and rubbish," she said. "The rest must have been the priests' quarters. Bristol is in one of them. You must be starving. I have kept some supper hot for you."

The commonplace of the last sentence sounded strangely, amid the surroundings but Loudon and Serena went on gratefully to the fire. Through a seam, water dripped into a stone basin. Utensils of stone smoked with ancient use stood by the fire. The widow stripped some leaves from a rocky slab that was supported by boulders at the four corners and beneath which glowed ashes raked from the fire. On it, steaming and giving out delicious odors, was the big fish they had brought from the pool, surrounded with tuberous roots.

"It may be overcooked," said Mrs. Gower, with the manner of the hostess

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whose elaborate menu has been kept waiting by delinquent guests. "I had almost made up my mind to start in alone. I found the yams and the *taro* in an old garden in front of the house and I have boiled a palm-cabbage. Bristol has had the rest of the oysters."

"How did you ever get him here and find this place?" queried Loudon.

"After you've eaten I'll tell you all about it. Mr. Loudon, will you serve the fish?"

They sat on a soft carpet of old mats and bark-cloth close to the combination stove and table and the food was dispatched with a celerity that proved their need and appreciation of it. When nothing was left but the bones and head, Mrs. Gower produced fruit and sat back, her shoulders against the rock, surveying them with benignant satisfaction.

"We shall be fairly comfortable here, I think," she said. "The fire has made the air sweet and, aside from the mortuary, the place is quite convenient. I had to drive out a lot of bats and it could stand some cleaning but we could do a lot worse. Now, you talk first. I am just as curious as you are."

She nodded with narrowed eyes as Loudon finished.

"There is some one on the island besides ourselves and Rotorua," she said, "if the king has not shared the fate of his man, which seems probable. I haven't so much to tell. You had been gone quite a while and I was getting uneasy about Bristol who was entirely out of his head. I had almost made up my mind to venture out and get him some more water when, just as I was parting the bushes to see if the way was clear, I heard footsteps above the cave-mouth and some bits of rock came falling into the brush. At first I thought it was you and then I heard a voice swearing in a strong Scotch accent."

"The skipper!"

She nodded at Loudon.

"Next minute he lost his footing and came crashing down, grasping at the bushes and tore away part of the screen as I shrank back.

"He picked himself up and I felt certain he would investigate the hole he had uncovered so I got my 'popgun' ready and clapped my hand over Bristol's mouth. He was beginning to sing snatches of songs and, while I would have rather enjoyed using that Scotch villain as a target, I decided that discretion was the better part of valor.

"As it turned out the 'skipper,' as you call him, started to enter the cave and then changed his mind. Some one whistled. It was quite a way off but shrill and he went off down the hill, crashing through the shrubbery. I took a look at him. His arm was in a sling and he was making what he would term, 'heavy weather of it.'

"The storm might easily have piled those bushes up and he might have not suspected anything. They may not know we are here, though, if they killed the native, they may have found something out from him first. And it was more than likely that they would take a notion to look over the cave. When I looked at Bristol again he had broken into a sweat and was rational for the first time. He said he thought he could make shift to move with my help and I decided to get him to a safer place and get back in time to warn you higher up the ridge, on your way home.

"I couldn't risk leaving a message. Bristol was tottery but we managed to steal through the fallen trees and get to this side of the ridge. I left him in a comfortable place while I tried to get in touch with you. I went up the ridge to where the fall outside drops. It began to get on to sunset and I was afraid I might not be able to find Bristol again. When I got back to where I had left him, he was gone.

"I hardly knew what to do until I heard his voice. He had gone out of his head again and there he was, shouting through the broken trees at the top of his voice, singing, of all things, the 'Road to Mandalay.'

"I went after him to the tune of—

Ship me somewhere east of Suez,

and he led me a hard chase, staggering down-hill as fast as I could follow. I called to him—he was making enough noise to rouse any one within half a mile—and he looked back and started to run. He scrambled over some trees close to where I met you with the torch and, as luck had it, found the path we came down. He kept ahead of me and dodged into the temple and behind the idol before I caught up with him. It was pretty dark outside and in here it was pitchy. I heard him breathing and spoke to him and—he must have had some

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crazy idea I wanted to injure him—for he jumped for me.

"We had quite a tussle—" she smiled placidly at the looks of her listeners—"but I am a wiry old lady, Mr. Loudon, and I managed to handle him for a minute or two when he suddenly collapsed. I let him down and found matches in his pockets. I could hear water dripping and when I investigated I found a pile of wood, where I built the fire. Then the bats came out and smothered us till they found their way through the opening. Bristol's head was bleeding again and I had trouble stanching it.

"I was in a quandary. I thought the man was dying but eventually his pulse got stronger and he quieted down. I managed to get him into that side cave and when he seemed to be resting quietly, I started out for you. I had a torch and, right where Bristol had sprung at me, I found the fish where I had dropped it. It was quite dark outside but there were a lot of dry palm branches in the enclosure and I risked a little fire under the trees.

"I didn't want to leave Bristol and I argued that you two would be cautious. The bushes being torn away from the cave would warn you something had happened. I expected that you might use your call, Serena. The chances were against my finding you on the ridge. I didn't want to walk along with a torch. I didn't know exactly what to do. So I knelt down by the side of the heathen temple and prayed.

"I felt very much better for doing so," she said simply. "I was quite sure that you two were all right. That comfort was given to me very clearly. I knew I should hear your call before long."

She smiled and nodded at Loudon who was gazing spellbound at the revelation of pluck and faith.

"You may not quite understand that sort of thing, Mr. Loudon, but you will some day, I am sure. I stayed outside, gathering the yams and leaves for wrapping up them and the fish, which I did in the temple court. Once I went in again and put some fire under this stone table-thing to cook the stuff, took a look at Bristol, who was asleep, and came out again to wait. Then I heard your call and answered it. And—here we are."

Serena reached over and patted her aunt's hand. Loudon tried to say something in appreciation of the widow's qualities, found his words inadequate and suggested that they should take a look at the sergeant. They found him breathing heavily and feverish.

"He needs cold stoops on his head," said Mrs. Gower. "Serena, would you mind, I am a little tired." She went with them to the tiny fountain and lay down on the mats. When Loudon came back presently to rewet the cloths she was snoring blissfully.

Serena was stifling a yawn as he rejoined her and he sent her, against her will, to join her aunt.

"I'll look out for Bristol," he said. "You go to bed. I shall sleep back of his Ugliness the Idol. I don't think we are in any danger. They have evidently camped in the glen across the ridge. Tomorrow we must find out how many there are and make our plans. If they know, as they are bound to sooner or later, that we are on the island, they'll start their plots to get rid of us, or possession of us, whichever they figure out will be to their best advantage. There is not room enough on the island for all of us. But let that go until we've had some sleep."

"You have got to have your share too. If Bristol is restless, will you promise to call me?"

"I am not going to promise anything of the kind," said Loudon firmly. "You turn in."

She looked at him with a spirit of intimacy showing in her eyes that he had never seen there before.

"Do you know," she said, "it is rather delightful to be occasionally—how do you Americans put it?—'bossed' is the word, I think. Good night."

The sergeant appeared to sleep more deeply as the night progressed. Wearied to the limit, Loudon finally stretched himself across the entrance to the quarters of the forgotten priests, back of the idol that had proven powerless for protection against the plague. Great Scott, he thought, as his slumberous mind hazily revolved the day's happenings, the widow even hung on to the fish. She's ninety-nine per cent. efficient, all right. Queen Elizabeth had nothing on her.

He fell suddenly through the open drawbridge that spans the moat of sleep, one hand upon the butt of his automatic.

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CHAPTER XIX

HENDERSON

THE sergeant was in a deep stupor when Loudon looked in upon him. He had slept late from weariness. The day had dawned and gray light filtered through the old temple, past the idol and died in the gloom of the priests' quarters where Mrs. Gower still snored rhythmically beside her niece, about the ashes of the fire. The soldier's face had sunk at cheeks and temples and his limbs twitched constantly. Loudon realized that Bristol was very close to answering his last roll-call.

Outside the ruined forest was in a green twilight. He gathered some fruit from the plantation that was fast relapsing to jungle and took a bracing shower and plunge in the basin of the fall before he went back with the frugal breakfast.

The matter of commissary bothered him. They could not keep up their strength on fruits, they were not likely to run across another wounded bird and he could not spare any of his precious cartridges—he had just twelve shots left, and there might be three or four in the "pop-gun" of Mrs. Gower—to fire at those that could fly. He had seen no doves. There were plover on the shore but an automatic pistol is not a fowling-piece.

On the shore, their larder lay in oysters, fish and possible turtle eggs. But he did not want to risk a division of the party again. Bristol was obviously too ill to make effort in his own behalf. Yet good food was important and the Hawks were in possession of that part of the beach that was easiest to reach.

If they were to attempt a craft in which to try and reach New Mecklenburg they must be safe from interruption. A reconnaissance to discover the force of the enemy was absolutely necessary. Necessary also was their elimination as a dangerous factor. They would have to be overpowered, held so, while raft or canoe was built and then, either taken along as prisoners or left marooned on the island.

To that end also the cartridges must be preserved unless—Loudon discovered that he felt little if any compunction at the thought of killing the Hawks. It would be in open fight, of course. But first they must learn how many were opposing them.

And where was Rotorua? His strength and savage strategy was a mainstay sadly missed. Serena Hargrave, for all her pluck, was close to a physical breakdown. Her aunt could be in little better case though her time-marked physique did not show the signs as plainly. She would make an ideal jailer for the Hawks if they could once corral them, thought Loudon. But all plans depended upon the size of the odds. That some natives had come ashore seemed a certainty. The dead islander had been slain beside his own fire. The broken forest might be peopled by twenty men scouting silently for the survivors of the king's party.

He took a closer survey of the temple. The idea suddenly came to him that, if the idol were back in its original position it would completely block and hide the entrance to the priests' quarters. Investigation showed him that this was the case. The image had slid forward upon the slab of rock which had been its pedestal and, if the latter, deep-sunk into the soft earth, could be elevated again to horizontal, nothing would give any indication of the caves behind it, except to the initiate. And they were long since dead of the plague.

But there must have been a hidden way for the priests to enter. The head of the god was little more than a mask, a hollow shell with widely gaping mouth through which the priests could utter oracular answers from a ladder set to the shoulders of the deity, unseen and unsuspected.

He passed behind the graven block. The two women were stirring and Serena jumped up quickly at his footsteps and came toward him. He showed her the fruit and told her of his conclusions.

"I am going to look for some opening leading from here to a place in the jungle where priests could enter and exit unobserved," he said. "It is likely to be a natural rift enlarged."

"I'll help you search while aunt fixes the fruit," she said. "We must get some torches from outside."

He showed her the position of the idol and explained how, once it was in place, the rest of the party could remain hidden while one of them foraged along the beach.

"There'll be nothing but fire and torchlight but it will mean safety."

"You mean that you are going out alone. What will happen to us if anything goes wrong with you?"

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For the life of him Loudon could not draw the distinction between selfishness and anxiety in the manner of her question.

"We haven't found the opening yet," he answered.

In the next cave to where Bristol lay, growing weaker every hour, the torch showed a fissure none too wide to admit Loudon, with rude, worn steps of stone leading downward. The air was sweet and fanned the torch as Loudon, with the girl at his heels, followed its windings. The slope soon leveled and, after they had traversed two hundred paces they saw daylight ahead and heard the gush of water. The narrow way vaulted out into a chamber the sides of which ran with moisture and were thickly set with ferns. Its mouth was closed by the waterfall, curving outward enough to let them pass to the open ravine dry-shod and barely sprinkled, brushing through masses of ferns that, with the cascade, effectually blocked any suggestion of a passage back of the fall.

"There is our back door to safety," he said. "After breakfast, such as it is, I'll lever back his Nibs to his old position and then see if I can pick up something more substantial to eat and try to find out something about Henderson and his crowd. I an going to ask you to stay behind, Miss Hargrave. Toruki is dead and the revolution is at an end but that gang on the schooner would like nothing better than to lay their hands on you. You are their quarry. One of us can go more quietly than two. There are not arms for both of us. Your aunt, staying with the sergeant, will need her pistol. If I should happen to get captured——"

"They will kill you."

"They will do worse than that by you."

She was silent.

"You don't want me to go," she said finally. Never before had she used so feminine a weapon.

"Frankly, I don't. I shall run no risks that I can possibly avoid."

For a moment she looked rebellious, inclined to assert her right to leadership. A glance at Loudon's lean jaw made her shrug her shoulders and suggest that they go in to breakfast.

After the meal she helped him to raise the idol, placing rocks in position to act as blocks while he levered with the tough stem of a fallen palm. After the god once more leered from his platform, they brushed over the dirt. They had carried plenty of firewood and palm-torches inside and Loudon saw the girl to the passage behind the fall before he started beachward.

He went slowly and warily, keeping to the near side of the ridge and forcing a fresh path to the low cliffs that fringed the beach. His first objective was the mangroves, for oysters, with an eye for turtle trail. Later, they could contrive lines and hooks. There was a maze of rock fragments close to the cliffs and he kept in the shelter of these until he reached the mangroves, partly covered by the receding tide.

Most of the oysters were submerged but he took what he could find, working carefully, with stops for looks and listenings. Nothing disturbed him and he made a rough bag of his coat for the shell-fish, carrying them as he worked his way through the boulders toward the big tide-pool where they had found the big fish, in the hope of similar luck.

A large crab scuttled under some weeds at the bottom and he looked about for a stick to dislodge it. There was a fragment of planking a few yards away and he walked over to it. So far as he could see, the tide had played sexton with the sharks that follow the flood for assistants. No bodies were visible.

AS HE stooped for the bit of wood some one hailed him.

"Mr. Loudon! Oh, Mr. Loudon!"

With the first syllable Loudon dropped behind the cover of the nearest rocks, pistol in hand, looking toward the direction of the voice, cliffward. A tall figure, one arm in a sling, stood clear of the trees, the free hand cupped to his mouth.

"Dinna shoot, mon," called the skipper. "I'm not armed. I want a bit of a talk wi' ye. I'll be comin' doon."

Henderson disappeared and Loudon swiftly took up a more strategic position in the center of an irregular ring of boulders that might have formed a pool but for one narrow gap level with the sand. It was isolated and formed an excellent temporary fortress.

Henderson appeared presently by the mangroves and came toward him, slightly dragging one foot, his clothes, consisting only of a singlet and duck trousers, torn and slimed with weeds and mud, a pitiable

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object. Loudon leaned his elbows upon a breast-high rock, his automatic prominently displayed, waiting for the skipper to open the parley. At ten paces he halted him.

"What have you got to say?" he challenged.

Almost ludicrously, like an awkward stork, Henderson managed to sit cross-legged on the sand, looking deprecatingly toward his passenger.

"We're fair beat, Mr. Loudon," he said. "I've come to make terms wi' ye. We've been in the wrang, I'm free to admit that, but we've had our punishments and I'm appealin' to ye now in the name of humanity."

There was a whine to the man's voice that smacked of hypocrisy and roused the gorge of Loudon.

"You've got yourselves into a nice net, Henderson," he said. "I suppose you understand your position, regardless of what lies between us? Abduction, robbery and insurrection are not pleasant charges to face and, sooner or later, you'll have to do so."

"Some of us, Mr. Loudon. There's some has faced them a'ready. I'm not crawlin' from my share, ye ken, but 'twas Brewster planned this affair fro' the start. I joined wi' him, i' a measure, but I was sore tempted, what wi' the way trading has been since the war. But Brewster——"

"You're as guilty as the rest," said Loudon disgustedly. "I heard you all through the schooner's transom."

A gleam of malice showed in the skipper's eyes.

"Aye, so we guessed. Ye were too smart for us, Mr. Loudon, we've seen that. And now that ye've got the top hand I'm askin' ye for mercy."

Loudon was puzzled. He still suspected some trick and determined to make the skipper show his hand.

"Why did not Brewster come?" he asked.

Henderson shook his head.

"He canna. The man lies wi' a broken back, not able to move hand or foot or neck. Edler is drooned wi' Griffin. There's but the twa o' us alive, Mr. Loudon. Me wi' a broken arm and Brewster paralyzed. 'Twas the punishment o' Providence."

"Cut out the cant, Henderson. Do you mean that only you and Brewster got to land?"

"One boat tipped i' the falls. We had but time to launch three. And the ither twa' o' them splintered on the reef. I cam' ashore by my lane. I found Brewster yester-morn pinned beneath a palm that the storm had felled. My own arm was broken."

"Who bound it up for you in those splints?"

The cunning malice in Henderson's eyes gleamed once more. He hesitated for a second.

"There was ane o' my crew that got through," he said. "I didna mention him, for the coward deserted when he found us powerless to aid him. He could get alang better than we, ye ken. Noo, Mr. Loudon, we're i' your hands. Brewster 'll never get well. I need a surgeon. We're willin' to come in and take our medicine.

"We can build a bit of a catamaran wi' a big sweep and mak' shift to fix a sail. I can captain ye to New Mecklenburg. Ye'll never mak' it alane through the currents an' I ken them better than e'en the king. That should be worth something. We didna find the gold nor the pearls and we put oursel's i' your hands. You and the king can work the sweep and ye can deliver us to justice if ye will."

He looked keenly at Loudon as he paused. The latter said nothing for a while. Evidently Henderson did not know that the king was not with them. Therefore they did not know much about their strength or weakness. The tale was plausible, even to the selfish desertion of the native. Perhaps he had met and killed the king's man. Perhaps he had met and killed the king.

"How did you know we were ashore?" he challenged.

"The kanaka told us he had seen your trail."

It fitted well, Loudon thought, yet he suspected. If Brewster were paralyzed with a broken spine and Henderson practically helpless with only his left arm, they could easily hold them prisoners and deliver them at New Mecklenburg. And the skipper's practical experience would be of aid. They could protect themselves against the one native.

"How was your kanaka armed?" he asked.

"Wi' a spear that washed ashore. Naught else. We ha' nothing but oor naked hands, Brewster and mysel'. Ye wouldna leave us alane on the isle? Ye ken the kind o' man my Malayta boy is. He would

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murder us for our meat if he took the notion. Ye are armed."

"You would have left the women to Toruki."

"There ye wrong me. We would ha' seen they cam' to no harm."

"Where is Brewster?"

"On the beach beyond the bit stream, blisterin' i' the sun an' sufferin' the tortures of hell, for I canna move him by my lane. Ye can place us where ye will. You an' the king can pack him i' a litter. We're on your mercy, Mr. Loudon. If ye leave us on the isle our deaths will be on your souls."

"That would worry me little. You had no compunctions against taking our lives for the sake of a little gold."

"We planned nothing worse than to leave ye on an atoll for a whiles, whole-bodied, not the cripples we are."

Loudon still pondered. He decided to keep the absence of the king a secret as long as he could.

"Rotorua will not turn a hand to help Brewster, of that I am very sure," he said. "You wounded the sergeant. I am the only available man left in the party." He watched the skipper narrowly as he spoke. Henderson lowered his eyes.

"Then we must mak' the best shift we can," he answered. "My boy will not come back. He has no love for me since I thrashed him."

Loudon remembered the incident. A member of the crew had been caught pilfering and the skipper had manhandled him. He recollected the sullen look of murder in the sailor's eyes. Henderson's story hung together.

"Show me where Brewster is," he said. "And remember, Henderson, at the first sign of treachery I'll send a bullet through your head."

"I'm no willin' to die yet. I ha' a family to support. What harm could two cripples do ye?"

Loudon followed behind the skipper, finger to trigger. Henderson took the line of the tide and they passed stream and glen, coming at last to a cove where Henderson pointed out Brewster.

"Yon's the tree I heaved from him," said the skipper. "He's conscious, ye ken, but the spinal cord must ha' been injured. He's not in such great pain beyond the awfu' scorchin' o' the sun. Here's Mr. Loudon, Brewster."

The gambler lay motionless save for a twitch of his lips and the roll of his eyes toward Loudon. His always pallid face was sun-blistered and a blue beard-growth was thick on chin and cheeks.

"I've put in my last chip, Loudon," he said. "It's up to you to give me a showdown or not. It will not make so much difference. I've a fancy to die between sheets if I can. The tree caught me low down on the back and the numbness has grown. It's as well, for I've no liking for being either a curiosity or a nuisance. If Henderson can help you get away from here and you'll pack me along you can do what you like with me. They can't do worse than put me in hospital as long as I last."

His eyes closed and he caught at his lower lip with his teeth, a spasm passing over his face.

"We canna leave him here on the naked beach," said Henderson. "Man, it's no human."

"All right," said Loudon. "We'll fix up a litter and take him into camp. I'll carry one end and you'll have to take one of the other corners, Henderson. We'll have to leave him here for a little while. I want you to come along with me."

"I'm willing to do your bidding from now on, Mr. Loudon. We'll be back in a wee while, Brewster."

The gambler's cracked lips opened in what was apparently intended for a smile but showed as a sneer that was half a snarl.

"A little water before you go," he said. "I can't help myself."

Loudon brought him a young coconut and held his head while he swallowed gratefully.

"I haven't got the right of decision in your case, Brewster," he said. "As far as I am personally concerned everything is cleared off the board. And, until we manage to get away, we'll make you as comfortable as possible."

The man was punished as severely as anything man could devise, he thought. As he walked away with the skipper and glanced back to see the gambler's form lying helpless as the palm which had crippled him he felt sorry for the poor devil.

"Cut down like grain before the sickle," said Henderson. "He'll not even be able to handle cards. It would ha' been a mercy a'most, i' the tree had crushed his heid as well as his back. I'm no what ye'd ca' a

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godly man, Mr. Loudon, but I was brocht up weel i' my youth. The wages of sin is death. And puir Brewster micht as well be dead as the way he is. But we deserve it, I'm no tryin' to dodge that fac'."

Loudon strode on, ignoring the skipper's whining speech. It would be no easy job to get Brewster to the priests' quarters but that would be the best place for him. They could keep him in the temple itself. Either Serena or Mrs. Gower would have to hold up one corner of the litter. Tomorrow they could start to work upon some kind of a boat. They had come to the edge of the wood at last. A day or two would see them out of it.

CHAPTER XX

BREWSTER'S LAST TRICK

IT WAS Mrs. Gower, stalking like a grim grenadier, who held up with the help of Henderson's uninjured arm, the fore end of Brewster's litter. The gambler was lifted, inert and uncomplaining, on to the springy bed of palm leaves, half couch, half hammock and, save for an occasional moan, he bore the trip well until the end. When they set him down in the temple courtyard he lay with closed eyes and barely perceptible breathing. The widow did not appear to share Loudon's sympathy for the broken man, though she helped to make him comfortable at the foot of the idol.

"The man is a rogue and a villain," she said, careless of Henderson standing by. "It is not so much the affairs of myself and niece that he has plotted against but those of the British Government in consort with the French. He knew his hazards when he chanced being made an example of and, being a gambler by profession, he must accept his fate philosophically. Personally, I doubt if he is as badly hurt as he pretends to be. His circulation is perfectly good. Look at his fingernails."

Loudon was thankful that he was not to be arraigned for any crimes of *lèse-majesté* before such a judge as Mrs. Gower. She was the type, he fancied, who would object to the defacement of her king's head by postmarks.

They took Henderson through the passage back of the falls. Loudon had made sure that neither he nor Brewster possessed any weapons. Serena met them. Torches had been placed on the walls and a fire was burning. Her face was wet with tears.

"Bristol has gone," she said.

They buried the sergeant that night in the grove. Loudon dug the grave in the moist, soft, tropic soil and improvised a rude coffin from slabs taken from the crumbling temple. Mrs. Gower recited what portions she remembered of the church burial service, Henderson punctuating it by fervent "Amens."

Bristol had done his duty. If he had held the pass less gallantly they would never have won to the catamaran at Moitapu.

"We will take back his body when we get my father's," said the girl.

Loudon marveled to see the suddenly revealed sensitiveness of her character. But, with the return from the grave, she and her aunt became once more invested with a semiofficial shell, discussing ways and means of reestablishing the protectorate of Hapai. The skipper was placed for the night in one of the side caves. His arm seemed to pain him and his limp was more pronounced. His attempts at garrulity were nipped promptly in the bud. It was idle to longer pretend that Rotorua was still with them and Loudon sickened at the skipper's protestations of regret.

"He was a grand fighter," said the Scot. "And he would ha' been a great help at the sweep and the steering. I misdoubt but what that Malayta boy must ha' waylaid him. He was no armed, ye say?"

They had not mentioned the dead man they had found beside the little fire. Loudon could see no end gained by bringing up the matter but he marked a resolve to give the defaulting Malayta boy a short shrift if he came within pistol-shot. It was not likely that one native, armed with a spear, would molest them unless he wreaked the fancied vengeance against Henderson which the skipper affected to fear.

It was not pleasant to know that there was a hostile somewhere in the jungle but, with food plentiful, it did not seem probable that the kanaka would start trouble. But Loudon took one precaution, unnecessary as it seemed. He bound the lax limbs of Brewster before he left him for the night.

The next morning they lost no time on starting the making of the craft that was to take them to New Mecklenburg. Henderson suggested building it from logs, to be

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bound together as they floated, to offset the difficulty of launching the heavy structure. The mats in the priests' quarters would do well enough as sails, he asserted.

He seemed really eager to get away, throwing in many hints as to the fitness of mercy for himself since he had lost everything and had others dependent upon him. Mrs. Gower and her niece paid no attention to these suggestions, save once, when the girl told the skipper that much would depend upon his behavior.

He seemed to brighten up at that and showed them how to twist lines from ropy fibers of bark while he and Loudon went down to the beach to select a place for the boat-building. The skipper chose a spot where the beach sloped easily to a promontory of rock along which they could tow the logs to waist-deep water that was protected by the natural breakwater.

"We'll no ha' to fell our trees," he said, "or we'd ha' a hard time of it, I'm fearin'. We can tak' our pick from the fallen timber and burn off the roots and croons. Yon's the best wood, Mr. Loudon. It floats higher. Here's twa good logs. Ye might make a fire and I'll tend to the burning, whiles ye look for twa more like these to form the base o' the raft."

He helped to gather some dry twigs and broken boughs that were not too sappy to burn and Loudon hoisted the head of one prone tree to a rock, leaving room for the fire beneath to act as saw and ax. Henderson piled up the fuel with his one arm and Loudon bent to ignite it.

The tiny flame that started seemed to rise and roar into a volcano as a sudden blow crashed on the back of his head and he pitched forward over the trunk.

Henderson, his arm free from the make-believe splints, tore the automatic from Loudon's holster and fired at the latter's head. Loudon's legs shot up jerkily, blood covered his hair with sudden spouting, he rolled over on his back and lay still, one hand in the edge of the crackling fire.

The skipper stood for a second looking at his work, smiling evilly.

"Ye're no so crafty as ye thocht ye were, my laddie-buck," he muttered. "Lay there and burn,——ye."

He thrust the pistol into a pocket of his dilapidated trousers and turned to the back trail, taking a short cut through the live-fall of the trees.

LOUDON came to with the exquisite torture of the flames crisping his right hand and wrist. His head throbbed maddeningly and his groping left hand came away covered with blood. The bullet had plowed a furrow through his occipital plates, ranging round the curve of his skull above the ear. The blow of Henderson with a bough had been lessened by the curve of his shoulders. But for the fire he might have lain unconscious for an hour. Now he staggered to his feet, his wits blundering against the pain and suddenly co-ordinating to consciousness of what had happened.

He had cast his coat aside and he ripped away a tattered shirt-sleeve and, soaking it in brine, fastened it round his head. There was no question as to which way Henderson had gone. Rage at the skipper, at himself for having been caught napping, came to his aid. His pistol was gone but, at that, if he could reach the temple first, he should be a match for a one-armed man who was not left-handed, and another who was paralyzed.

Then the completeness of the trick flashed over him. Henderson's arm had never been broken, Brewster's paralysis was a fake pure and simple. What might be happening at the temple he did not dare to think.

He plunged on, his legs getting more reliable, obsessed with the determination to overtake Henderson and somehow regain possession of the gun. He had one clip full of cartridges in his pocket. There were only four in the pistol. Perhaps he could draw Henderson's fire successfully before the skipper realized that the automatic was only partly loaded.

How long he had lain by the log he could guess by the burn on his hand, severe but not crippling. Henderson could not be very far ahead and the trail was fairly rough with much of it across the fallen timber. He had helped the Scotch hypocrite across some of the trees and through the tangle on their way down.

The blood still came from his wound, soaking his shirt. But his head was easier, though his neck was stiffening. He stopped for a moment to listen. Some one was crashing through the brush ahead of him.

He swerved off to the right where the hurricane had stripped the ridge clear of the trees and ran at top speed. The skipper

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was in the valley which debouched into the gorge of the temple

Not dreaming of pursuit, he did not notice Loudon, who gained on the clearer ground until he was abreast of his man.

The ridge that Loudon was following ended in a rocky headland at the foot of which was a fairly open space free from all but a few down-thrown trees.

He was half-way down the declivity when the Scotchman saw him and fired. Hard-breathed from running, the skipper's shot went wide and he tried a second.

There were only two now in the pistol. Loudon exposed himself, taking the chance, and the third bullet struck some loose shale above his head. He picked up some loose fragments and hurled them at Henderson, now directly beneath him. As the skipper dodged the rocks, trying to get in another shot, Loudon charged full-tilt over the last pitch.

The Scot saw him coming, a hideous spectacle, besmeared with blood, his head wrapped in a rag, clotted crimson, one arm bare, his eyes blazing, and, in a sudden panic, pulled trigger again.

Missing pointblank, he tried once more. The cartridges were all gone and Loudon shouted as he rushed. The skipper cursed as he struggled with the weapon and then, realizing that his fire had been drawn, hurled the automatic far to one side. It fell crashing into a pyramid of tangled verdure, breaking through leaves and plunging to the bottom of the mass, as effectually lost as a needle in a haystack.

Henderson sprinted, leaping over the prostrate trunks, tearing through the brush with Loudon in inexorable pursuit. The skipper tripped over a ground-vine and Loudon sprang upon him, buffeting him with a blind wrath as the wiry Scotchman twisted and grappled with him. They rolled over the ground together. The skipper thrust his knee upward and struck him in the groin.

The agony sickened him but he held on, still uppermost as they squirmed. Henderson was struggling savagely, desperately, biting and snarling, and Loudon buried his head in the other's chest while the nausea fought his will. The tense body of the skipper slackened, his arms fell away and Loudon struggled to his knees, gazing down into the other's face, gray with agony.

"Eh, mon, my heart!"

But for the ghastly face and wildly dilated eyes Loudon would have thought it a ruse. For the last few seconds he had been powerless of offense. Henderson's face turned to a dull slate and he fought for his breath, throwing himself upward in a bow from heels to head and suddenly slumping to earth. Some swift lesion in a weak heart had ended the conflict.

Sure that the man was dead, Loudon left him staring at the sky and hobbled on at the best speed he could muster. He struck the path that led to the temple, his teeth clenched in his lip with the constant stab in his groin. He heard a confused shouting of voices and the shriek of a woman.

He broke through to the clearing about the temple palisade. His head was reeling and he could only see a blur of moving figures. He called upon his last reserves and staggered through the gap in the fence. Brewster was before him bearing Serena in his arms! Brewster, in full possession of his strength!

The gambler set down the girl as Loudon lurched toward him and it seemed that others grasped her. But everything outside of the figure of Brewster was hazy. With a final flurry of strength Loudon struck aside the gambler's arms and grappled with him, his fingers seeking for a throat-hold. They smashed against one of the images and the rotten wood broke. Loudon felt himself sinking into an abyss of blackness. It was the end.

CHAPTER XXI

BREWSTER LAUGHS

FOR the second time Loudon regained consciousness. It was water, not fire that spurred his lagging senses. Water swirled about his middle, the sun struck fiercely at his eyes from the shifting surface.

He was bound to a stake in the channel of the comma-shaped little bay where he and Serena had seen the smoke and found the body of the dead native. Two grinning islanders, submerged above their loin-cloths, were tightening the cords that fastened his arms about the stake which was sunk firmly in the sand and extended above his head.

The blood was once more oozing down from his wound. In front of him floated one of the whale-boats of the *Manawa*, its gunwale ripped off, one side patched with

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canvas, damaged but seaworthy in fair weather. Henderson's supercargo mocked at him from the bows, the oarsmen were partly the schooner's own crew, partly Toruki's men. One of the boats had won to shore after all.

Edler and Griffin were missing. Perhaps the skipper had told the truth about their having drowned. Loudon's mind did not take in details readily. But it was Brewster in the stern, beside Serena and her aunt. The older woman seemed unconscious, the girl was gazing at him with eyes wide in apprehension. Now Brewster was speaking.

"Coming to, are you?" asked the gambler with an oath, the foul soul of the man sitting in his eyes. "Well you are just back in time to say good-by. The flood is running and we must be off. You'll be able to watch us for a couple of hours if the sharks don't get you. This is a favorite little bay of theirs.

"—— you," he went on virulently, leaning forward. "You killed Henderson, did you. Did us out of a skipper? Well, this is where we get even, my dudish smart Alec. We are going to persuade the ladies to show us where the gold is and then we are going to take a little pleasure trip. I haven't worked out all the details yet but they will happen after you have cashed in. Keep still, you!"

He flung one arm round the girl's waist and clapped his hand over her mouth.

"I'll let you say good-by presently. You had better forget him at the same time. It will make things more comfortable for you."

"You poor gull"—his anger mounted as Loudon looked at him steadily—"you managed to hide yourselves nicely for awhile and you had the edge with your gun. But we hid ourselves better, boat and all, and tricked you for the boob you are. We killed one of your men who had no better sense than to make a fire in the open. There's one left to reckon with and that's your fat fool friend, the king. We've hunted the island for him and, if he's on it, he's furnishing food for the birds somewhere under the trees. So you needn't reckon on him performing a miracle for your benefit at the last minute."

One of the natives spoke rapidly.

"Tide he come now, boss."

"All right, give way there."

The bows of the boat swung to the reef entrance as the men pulled and backed water. Brewster took his hand from the girl's mouth as she turned toward Loudon and fought with the gambler.

"I'm not going to let you go till I'm through with you, young lady," he said. "Stroke faster, men."

Loudon had said nothing. The incoming tide lapped greedily at him.

"Good-by."

Serena had broken one hand free and was waving it. His throat was dry as ashes but he summoned a voice that was fairly steady.

"Good-by," he called.

The boat shot forward through the entrance. Brewster's sneering laugh came floating back to him. The wavelets surged above his hips. He tested stake and cords. The one had been well driven, the others securely tied. He was doomed to stay there while the tide mounted, to neck, to chin, to mouth, watching the boat diminishing toward Hapai across a Summer sea where the sun danced on the water!

And there were the sharks. To come in presently foraging for mullet and find a more toothsome meal. The blood from his shirt was already staining the water pink. To the sea-tigers, the faint trail would be a plain highway. They would come in, their fins gliding toward him, there would be a swirling turn, a slash of fierce teeth and then a mad battle, rending! tearing! . . .

His head was free and he glanced down. The tide was up to the arch of his ribs.

He threw up his chin.

"God, give me strength to come through like a man."

The boat seemed crawling sluggishly over the water though he could see the play of the oars and mark the figures growing smaller. A gull swooped about his head looking at him with black hard eyes. Its beak, if the sharks spared him, would be chiseling at him after the tide went down.

The sun beat upon him and his sight grew dim. His chin dropped and he forced up his head with an effort. The boat was almost a speck, he could just distinguish the outthrust oars. The water was up to the third button of his shirt, well above his pinioned elbows. The gull was back again with a companion. More were squawking in the air back of him.

A heavier surge came in and embraced him. He looked out to sea with eyes that shifted wildly. The little bay was at the eastern end of Faiu.

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Between him and the horizon he saw the white hull of a gunboat, bluff-bowed, tin-sided, obsolete, the brown smoke pouring from her funnel, making her best of ten meager knots. A puff of white smoke lifted from her bows. Something plunged into the sea, well short of the distant whale-boat and the dull boom of the gun came to him.

Hope came to Loudon as he gazed at the patrol-boat and then left him. There were easily three miles between it and the escaping whale-boat. On board they suspected something amiss or they would not be firing. Keen eyes were doubtless holding the fugitives in the vision of powerful glasses. But they could not see him and he could not signal. The breakers on the reef formed an intermittent screen and they would not be likely to look in his direction.

No call of his could reach them. By the time they overhauled the whale-boat and returned for him the tide would be filling his lungs. There was some melancholy pleasure in the thought that the Hawks would be captured and the two women rescued, but life and the joy of it had surged through him at sight of the vessel.

But he had not reckoned with the march of the times. The *Pelican* was a slow old tub, the best the British Navy could allow its far-Pacific patrolmen in those troublous times, but its commander was a man of resource and he had borrowed a launch from the commissioner at New Mecklenburg that could run rings round the gunboat.

It sped from the side of the *Pelican* like a torpedo, rushing swiftly to sea. Another followed at slower speed, making for Faiu. The tide was beginning to slop about Loudon's shoulders when he desperately hailed it as it passed along the reef looking for an entrance.

The rollers boomed above his best efforts though he yelled until his voice was reduced to a whisper. An ensign in the stern caught sight of the break in the reef, the stem of the launch was headed channelward and Loudon saw the brass letters of the ship's name twinkling on the bows.

Clasp knives freed him, stout hands pulled up the stake and lifted him over the gunwale. A swig from the ensign's flask restored his voice and he told enough of his story to start the launch to sea.

"Glad we got you in time, sir," said the ensign. "Drew has the commissioner's launch. He'll have all the sport before we catch up with them, though if the beggars aren't armed there won't be any fight. Miss Hargrave and her aunt are not hurt, you said?

"By Jove," he went on. "Drew's up with them. They are putting up a fight after all. Hang this engine! Some one's hurt. The ladies are all right. And now it's all over, of course. Just my luck."

CHAPTER XXII

A KING'S PHILOSOPHY

THE slower launch drew alongside the faster in time to take the tow of the whale-boat in which were the surrendered natives, the downcast supercargo and, extended on the bottom boards, the body of Brewster. There was a tiny hole in his temple.

"Killed himself," the senior officer told his junior. "Hauled out a bit of a pistol he had taken from Mrs. Gower and potted himself through the temple. Cool as a cucumber about it. Will you shift over to my launch, Mr. Loudon? We'll get back to the ship first and you look as if you needed some attention."

Loudon accepted and made his way aft to where the girl welcomed him.

"We have some news for you, Miss Hargrave," said the officer, to whom the girl was evidently an object of mingled admiration and respect. "News from the front. Rather good news, you'll fancy it, I imagine. The chief has the cable. And there's a friend aboard who's asking for you, sir." He turned to Loudon.

"A friend of mine?"

"Friend of all of you, and a good one," chuckled Drew, conscious of his importance as news-dispenser. "I mean the king."

"Rotorua? How did he get in touch with you?"

"Swam. And some swim, even for an islander. Beats Captain Webb. Thirty-five miles in less than thirty hours. Some swim. Let him tell it. There he is at the side by the skipper."

The beaming face of Rotorua Rex, his body squeezed into white clothes that were spreading at the seams, shone like a newly minted medal of honor.

"*Eyah*, Laudoni!" he said. "They no let me come along in boat. *Kapitani* tell

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me too fat, boat no go along fast suppose I come. *Eyah! Talofa nui oe!*"

The commander of the *Pelican* seemed well known to Serena Hargrave and her aunt. He greeted them with ceremonious politeness and ushered them into his own cabin though not before the girl's fingers had grasped Loudon's and her eyes had shown their thankfulness.

The younger officers took charge of Loudon and soon had him ensconced in one of their bunks while the ship's surgeon patched him up.

"You have been pretty well knocked about, sir," said the medico. "Nothing serious fortunately. I think I shall prescribe Scotch whisky, *quantum suff.* Carried only medicinally these days."

The king was leaning against the wall of the cabin, doubtful of the strength of the furniture. He rubbed his stomach.

"Plenty sick myself," he said. "Much too long I swim."

"That night," he told "Laudoni," "you sleep plenty much. Not so much as old lady, but plenty tired. Bimeby storm go. I think how we can go along New Mecklenburg. Me, I want get back my kingdom before kanaka spoil everything along Hapai. I no think storm hurt um Hapai, but I think kanaka make plenty big mess along my things. Suppose we make um boat, take too long.

"I think more better I swim. I swim veri-well. All right. I go with Tori along shore and find one kanaka with bad leg. We find um his head hurt too. He *mate*. Tide he begin make ebb, just so right for me. We go along east side Faiu where current help me. I send Tori back tell you where I go. Tell you maybe two day gunboat come. Then—he expanded his enormous chest—I swim. By Go——ty I swim like shark. Salt water he plenty good along my wound. No good in stomach. Me I taste um now."

The doctor prescribed again. A marine knocked and announced that the captain would like the pleasure of Mr. Loudon's company with the ladies in his cabin, if he was feeling well enough.

Loudon asked Serena if her promised news was as good as the launch officer had suggested. She turned crimson and nodded.

"The best of news," said Mrs. Gower complacently. "Will you take a turn with me on deck?"

Wonderingly, Loudon obeyed her request.

"If I had a son like you, Mr. Loudon," she said, "I should be very proud of you. I am. And so is Serena. This is entirely aside from the services you have rendered the Government. Those will be duly recognized, I am sure. We owe you much.

"Rotorua will be rewarded by the regaining of his kingdom. I wish you could be rewarded as you might like to be. But I must tell you Serena's good news. There are few of the Hargraves left. Serena is almost the last direct descendant. We have lost many in the war. The title is now with a distant cousin.

"He is to marry Serena. It is a marriage of state as well as of affection. He has been wounded, so badly as not to be able to rejoin. He has won the Cross. Serena and he will preserve the Hargrave descent. You can see what it means to us."

"Why, that is fine," Loudon answered. "I am sorry he is wounded."

It was a lame answer and he knew it. Mrs. Gower patted his hand again.

"His wounds are his honor," she said. "And Serena will look out for him. I hope you will meet him some day, Mr. Loudon. We shall be very glad to see you."

She smiled and left him a trifle dazed. He walked to the rail. The *Pelican* was steaming toward Hapai. For the moment he had felt a little envious of the wounded bridegroom to be. Then he smiled as he remembered the widow's words. "Serena will look out for him." "I bet she will," he muttered. A heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder. Rotorua stood beside him.

"You like stop along me in Hapai?" asked the monarch. "Suppose you marry Missy Hargrave I give you *lele* island."

"I'm not going to marry any one, king."

"I think you jolly well right," Rotorua beamed. "That Missy Hargrave she—fine white *fahine* but I think she maybe *lele* bossy. I tell you, Laudoni, sometime wife make plenty *pirikea*. Me, I got twenty wife. Some pretty, some not so pretty. I tell you one thing. Suppose wife pretty, she all time bother along herself. Suppose wife not so pretty, she all time bother herself along you."

"That sounds like good philosophy, king," said Loudon. "I think it's about time for you and me to see the surgeon again. He may want to prescribe more medicine."

THE END

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That Blasted Discipline

By GORDON McCREAGH

Author of "The Brass Idol," "The Scarecrow."

THE *Texan*, U. S. battleship of the first line, was snugging down for the night. Two bells. All but standing lights and officers' quarters had been turned out an hour ago. The berth-deck sighed and echoed with the shufflings and mutterings of seven hundred drowsy men. The call, "Smok'n'-lamp-out," passed forward and presently the dark figure of the chief master-at-arms threaded its way between the long lines of bulging hammocks preparatory to making his report, "Lights out and all snug below, sir." Suddenly he stopped with a sharp cluck of annoyance.

"Petty Officer Corrigan, didn't you hear 'smokin-lamp'? Y' ought to know better'n that. Fine example to set, you with the eagle an' guns. Stow it now."

Third-class Gunner's-Mate Corrigan crammed a strong finger into the bowl of his pipe and heaved himself round on to his side with a barely restrained guttural rasp of fury. He clenched his brown fists out into the darkness and muttered in impotent frenzy after the man who represented authority. His mate on the left leaned over the edge of his hammock and whispered with cautious interrogation.

"What 'smatter with you these days, Jim? You shipped a grouch ever since we quit Havana harbor two month back; before that too, in Porto Rico Station you was actin' all sore's a cook's mate."

"Aw —— !" was all the reply that the other grated through his set teeth. After a frenzied silence, as though he could hold himself no longer, he burst out again:

"'Young men of spirit wanted'—'See the world'—'Good position for life'—Yah!" He quoted evidently from some oft-repeated catch-phrases. "What did we ever see? What'd we ever get? 'Sides 'Pipe down hammocks,' 'Pipe up nettin's,' 'Gun an' deck bright work,' an' 'Yes sir, please sir, aye, aye, sir'! 'S a helluva job for life!"

The other man was older, and the hot rebellion of youth against restraint had passed him over.

"Aw, it's a good enough service, Jim," he argued persuasively. "Look at you. You served two years, an' you got your ratin' badge already; you're drawin' thirty-three a month now, an' after the 'E' practise you'll be gun-pointer in the first class sure, 'n' that'll be another ten. All clear too. 'S more'n you'd ever log ashore."

"Ah to blazes with the service!" Corrigan snarled. "It's all right mebbe for them that can stand for their blasted discipline an' dooty stuff; but I've took all I can hold, I'll tell you that, Bill Summers. An' what do I care for their old ratin' badge? It means nothin' to me."

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—"*Silence* forrard there!" called a voice out of the darkness; and Petty Officer Corrigan gritted his teeth again in helpless revolt.

Jim Corrigan's was just another case of that peculiar disturbance of which the symptoms are so well known to the officers of both services. Naturally a youth of turbulent disposition, born and raised on the Brooklyn water-front, he had just as naturally gravitated to the congenial society of the "water rats," that gang of young toughs who infest the purlieus of Wallabout Bay. His bold spirit and quick wit had soon placed him high in their councils and he might even in time have aspired to the coveted honor of leadership, for he was wide-shouldered and lean-hipped—a scrapper from way back.

But in a moment of enthusiasm, lured by seductive posters and the far more seductive appearance of careless jollity of the men in the easy-looking uniforms who came from the gates of the Navy Yard, he had enlisted. Under the wing of Uncle Sam he showed promise and was making good in the gunnery branch; and then the novelty of the new life began to wear off and the irksome monotony of discipline began to creep in. Before the deeper psychology of that discipline had had time to manifest itself in him, his thoughts began to turn with ever-increasing frequency to the old days when he was a masterless man, free to come and go when and how he chose.

All the "cop-dodging," all the belly pinch and need faded into insignificance; only the memory of the freedom remained and grew in daily intensity; and the cumulative weight of restrictive regulations, unrelieved by the least excitement to break the daily round of monotony, galled his turbulent soul till now the smallest little item of restraint reduced him to a state of gnashing frenzy. Petty Officer Corrigan, therefore, gritted his teeth and rocked himself in impotent rage.

The next day was the day of the E practise, the final gun trials, after which the *Texan* was under orders to repair to "The Yard" for general overhauling. Corrigan was gun-pointer on B. L. R. 12 Mark 5 on the starboard side of the forward turret. It was a position of responsibility, requiring nerve and steadiness. He gave orders direct to the gun-trainer and loaders; and indirectly on his speed and accuracy depended the work of the whole gun-crew, not only in the turret itself, but all through A-5 M, the magazine which supplied the forty-five-foot monster.

On his word waited the "outside men," husky giants who worked the shell and ammunition hoists in the handling-room below the turret, and the "inside powder and shell men," who sweated behind steel flap-doors and handed out with amazing callousness the red-ended silk bags, sixty pounds approximately of high explosive and five of them to a full charge. Gun-pointer Corrigan, therefore, carried much on his shoulders.

Lieutenant Davidson, the junior officer in charge of the turret, called assembly for both gun-crews. He was full of enthusiasm.

"Men," he said. "I'm not going to say much to you; but I just want to hand on a piece of good news. I have it, unofficially of course, that our record stands very well in the fleet, and that we are within a very few points of the big E. That's all. You know what to do, and it's up to you. I wish us all luck. Fall out and take up your stations."

The E was the most coveted distinction which a turret crew could aspire to. "A block letter E, not more than eighteen inches high, to be painted on the winning turret in a conspicuous place," so said the regulations. Every member of the crew was entitled also to wear a white E on his blue uniform. With the E went sundry little privileges.

As soon as their officer was out of sight, the men broke into a shouting, scuffling demonstration befitting the occasion—all the exuberant horse-play of healthy, husky young animals. Only Corrigan was indifferent, sullen.

"Aw, what do I care for an old E! Talks at us like we was kids!"

His strong jaw stuck out disagreeably as he muttered and mumbled to himself at his station beside the long telescopic sight. He had reached a point of discontent at which nothing connected with duty in any way at all could please him.

The lieutenant stood with a stop-watch in his hand. The turret captain came up and saluted.

"All ready below, sir."

"Good. Stand by to fire! Commence—firing!"

Immediately the turret became a bedlam. A shrieking, roaring, slamming

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uproar, smashing on the ear-drums in a thunder of confusion at first, but presently resolving itself into a bedlam with a certain rhythm. The scream of the ammunition hoists, the crash as they reached the floor, the grunts of the men, the bang and clatter of the heavy shells, the softer thud of the powder bags, the slam home of the breeches, the hissed orders of the gun-pointers, all merged into the cacophony of a splendid machine.

But presently there crept a jarring note into the rhythm. Something in the organism of the great starboard gun was not running in its strictly appointed groove; it began to lose its stride, as it were. The gun-pointer cursed sullenly and closed his firing-key before he was well sighted in order to make up time. He scored a clean miss. He snarled at his trainer and loaders through his teeth —as though it was their fault!

They felt a fierce resentment, and would have snarled back, but discipline forbade. The sense of discord, however, was sufficient to break the smooth unanimity of their work. In an organization like that where every man does just one thing as fast as human brain and sinew will permit and repeats it right away again a little faster if possible, if perfect unison does not prevail disaster is sure to follow. The officer looked at his watch.

"Speed up there, starboard, speed up; you're nearly forty seconds behind."

His voice was curt; he, too, was feeling the effect of the nervous strain.

The gun-pointer swore viciously under his breath and cursed at his helpers. The turmoil in his soul spread itself in successive stages through the whole gun-crew; the receiving-men called querulously down to the handlers below; the loaders got rattled and fell over themselves in their frantic endeavor to put on an increase of speed which was not humanly possible. Then, in the confusion of hands, they managed somehow to heave in the last section of the charge *red end first.*

The man at the breech slammed the heavy block too almost on their finger ends, following the dominant thought, before his brain had had time to cummunicate the impression of the error to his muscles. Then with a rasping, "Arrgh!" he tore it open again. Just in time. It would have been a misfire, and the regulations then demanded a wait of full thirty minutes.

That calamity was averted, but many minutes of priceless time were lost in rectifying the mistake. The strain was more than human endurance could stand up under; the demoralization of the crew was complete. Their officer, with superhuman control, rallied them; he pulled them together, and handled them, and simply drove them on to a really creditable finish. But the total score . . . .

Even with the splendid work of the port gun to offset it, all hope of the coveted E was irrevocably lost for that year—and all through the primary disaffection of a single cog in the carefully built-up machine.

LATER, the officer in charge of the turret, when he had schooled his bitter disappointment, sent for the turret captain.

"I want you to find out who was the cause of that disgraceful mess today," he said.

"Aye, aye, sir." The turret captain saluted and went.

He had no need to find out. He knew. And the whole gun-crew knew; and well did Petty Officer Corrigan know that they knew. He knew, moreover, just what the turret captain's report would be, and the knowledge of his messmates' loyalty to himself only made him, in the disordered state of his mind, hate himself the more and everything else connected with the life he led.

"The men don't know how the thing started, sir," the turret captain reported. "They guess they got jangled somehow, an' they're all pretty much to blame alike."

"Hm!" said Lieutenant Davidson, and his eyes narrowed. He was no fool, this keen-faced young gunnery officer. "Hm, I thought that would be it. Very unfortunate affair altogether. Well, tell Petty Officer Corrigan I want to see him."

When Petty Officer Corrigan returned from that interview the madness had overtaken him. His strong fingers clenched and clawed themselves spasmodically, his rugged face looked as though he wanted something to kill. He found his friend Summers—he just had to talk to somebody —if he had not been able to get the load off his chest something would have burst inside. He flared into a growling recital of what he considered his wrongs.

"An' whaddo you think o' that?" he gritted. "Him that's hardly more'n a snotty talkin' at me like I was a blasted

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gobbie. Let'm wait! Wait till we lay up in the Yard; that's all I got to say."

"What are you aimin' to do?" Corrigan's demeanor was such as to cause alarm.

"Do? I'm through, I tell you. Here's where I cast off. I've stood all the dooty an' obedience I can hold. I quit."

He voiced his intention of crime boldly and without restraint. As with the gun-crew, it never occurred to him that one of his messmates would "blow the gaff." That was one thing he had absorbed in the Navy: the men "stood by."

His intention was not as vicious as his friend had for a moment feared, but it was bad enough.

"You gonna desert?" whispered Summers seriously. "Don't you do it, son. Jes stick it out a while an' it'll all come around. Don't you know that thirty per cent. o' them's caught? An' then it's eighteen months in the brig for you *an'* dishonorable discharge. Lay off o' that, mate."

"Thirty per cent., yah! I got a girl in Saddler Street, an' she'll tog me to an outfit o' civils, an' when I get in with the old gang again all the dicks in the State don't draw a sight on me."

Bill Summers, the six-year man of experience, argued long and earnestly, but all that he could get out of Corrigan was:

"Wait till the first shore leave. That's all I got to say, Bill Summers."

In due course the *Texan* docked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and in due course Corrigan entered his name in the liberty list. When the word was passed, "Lay aft the liberty party," he saw to it that his uniform and shoes were in the most perfect condition; he had no desire to have his shore leave set back for any unseamanlike slovenliness. With the call, "Lay aft on the quarter deck, fall in for inspection," he took his place with a certain self-conscious bravado and a tingling sense of triumph. Thought of possible arrest and retribution never entered his mind.

Ten minutes later Petty Officer Corrigan left the U. S. battleship *Texan* and stepped ashore, "for good," he said to himself vindictively, "blast em all, an' double blank their blasted discipline!"

He breathed deeply. He was filled with a wild exhilaration of freedom and a vague sense of heroism—he had done something which the gang would commend, it took quite a bit of nerve, that. How good the dirty old streets looked! How good was the festering smell of the back alleys along the water-front! He filled his chest with it. This was home! Two years he had been away from it. Two long years of dreary, uneventful naval training. It had built him up quite a lot though; he would be a big dog in the gang now. He made his way with a feeling of the returning hero straight to the house in Saddler Street.

The girl fell all over him with shrieks of spectacular enthusiasm. She was pretty enough in her tough little way, an over-tinted three-color reproduction of many hundreds of others, with all the exaggerated craving for effect in speech and dress and make-up that is an unconscious instinct of her kind.

"Jim! Ooh Jim!" she shrilled. "My, ain't youse de swell doll in dem duds! Lookut who's here, ma! C'mon in an' le's give youse de up an' down! Lookut, mommer!" All in one excited breath.

Petty Officer James Corrigan, late of the U. S. Navy, was conscious of a fleeting distaste for this over-profuse exhibition; he felt, too, a vague sort of realization that his girl spoke a language different from his own. He submitted to being led into the once familiar atmosphere of noisy admiration mingled with the odors of cooking and rank air and unwashed clothes. When he had been sufficiently displayed, the girl took matters in hand with the candor of her upbringing and environment.

"Now ma, you 'n de kids fade. Me'n my feller wants to mush it up."

Somehow Petty Officer Corrigan was not so anxious to demonstrate affection just then. He came directly to the point.

"Lil," he said, "I've cut loose, slung my hook. I'm fed up with the service, an' I'm goin' to get in with the old gang again."

"Yeah?" the girl gasped with a thrill of delicious excitement, followed instantly by a sense of triumph. To have a real hard-case deserter for a sweetheart would raise her to a position of splendid envy among her crowd.

"Yep," said Corrigan firmly. "I'm through. I ain't goin' back any more; an' I want you to fix it up to get me an outfit o' citizen's clothes so's I can hide up. I'll have to have em right away!"

The girl looked at him with startled, wide-

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open eyes, and with a sudden fear she shrank away from him.

"Jim I—I can't. Don' hit me, Jim. Honest to Gawd, I can't—not right away—not 'fore t'morrer. Don't hit me!"

"Hit you? What would I want to hit you for?" growled Corrigan.

The idea came to him with something of a jolt to his self-respect. It was difficult to remember that two years ago, in keeping with the ethics of his fellows, it would have been the natural thing to beat the girl and drive her out to procure the garments somewhere. He continued with a gruffness which hid his internal disturbance:

"Say Lil, you musta been runnin' with a pretty hard crowd lately. You—you're kinda different to what you was."

"Me?" The girl broke into the shrill mirth of relief. "Why, I ain' bin wid a soul but jes de boys; 't's youse 'at's all diff'rent, Jim, you talk eddicated."

Jim hotly denied both allegations and returned to the all-important matter of clothes.

"By t'morrer night," the girl assured him. " 'F youse kin lay up somewheres for de day I'll go to Micky de Dip an' make him stake a swell layout 'r I'll wreck his mush. Now youse hide up careful, Jim, an' I'll have em t'morrer night sure. Swarty's is a fly joint."

TO SWARTY'S, then, Jim Corrigan repaired. For the rest of that evening and all the next day he remained in a close, beer-sodden back room which oppressed his senses with an altogether disproportionate weight in contrast to the clean habit of shipboard. He wanted to go out and dive into the old haunts where he would meet the boys again; his spirit craved for that atmosphere of freedom and something doing which he had promised himself so fondly. But he did not dare to stir out by daylight. His leave had expired with eight o'clock of the preceding evening, and he dared not risk being seen and taken in by one of the ship's patrols. This fugitive-from-justice stuff, while heroic possibly, had its drawbacks; the monotony of it was almost as bad as shipboard.

He sat, therefore, and brooded in sullen discontent. His mind reverted to the hatefulness of the restraint, and the super-hatefulness of the officers who had represented the authority behind that restraint. It was quite impersonal, except that he felt the itching longing of the uncontrolled strong man to assert, if only for once, his physical superiority over anybody else whom a loathly discipline had always placed beyond his reach.

With the evening he had worked himself into an ugly mood of recklessness and bravado. In his impatience he hardly waited for dark before sallying out from his dismal "hidie hole." The safest way to Saddler Street would have been through a roundabout series of back alleys. But there was a short cut, a long, dark street of foul and gloomy stoops and the blank back walls of warehouses. Unfortunately it was also a short cut from the Navy Yard to the avenue, and therefore used quite a bit by the service.

Corrigan hesitated on his course for a few seconds, but only for a very few; then with a vicious grunt he swung boldly into the shortest way. What did he care anyhow. What if he did happen to run into a patrol, it would have to be a hard mob to get away with him, there would sure be some scrap. And it seemed to him, after two years of inaction, that a fight would be like a God-sent rainfall in the desert.

He strode round the corner—and then, for all his bravado, he instantly shrank back into a dwelling entrance. Half-way up the street there walked crisply a figure, not in uniform, but by the set of the shoulders and the carriage and the indefinable everything, undoubtedly a man of the service; and since not in uniform, undoubtedly an officer. The deserter peered from his dark nook; that first fleeting glimpse had been unpleasantly familiar. He looked at the retreating figure, and then drew in his breath with a sharp hiss. There was no mistaking that carriage even in that dim-lit street—it was one of the *Texan's* officers, and, of all people, Lieutenant Davidson. There would have been not the slightest chance of escaping recognition.

"Whe-ew," Corrigan breathed gratefully. "That was close enough to scrape my paint. Half a second earlier, an' I'd 'a' collisioned him."

It was the primal impulse of the fugitive. And then in the same breath he growled angrily. Why should he have to duck and dodge. He felt a sudden hot resentment against the cause of his quick fear, and in

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the fractional seconds that his mind dwelt upon it his resentment grew and piled up on top of the fierce resentment he had felt when this same officer had given him that "call-down" over the matter of the E practise.

A hundred other swift memories of oppression came crowding in on the already overweighted pile. With his next breath his thought was not, "What a close shave," but, "What a God-given piece of luck." Here was the one chance in a million. If he could get only one good slam at the chief representative of that cursed authority that had galled him so, everything would be wiped clean; it would give him back his self-respect as one of the old gang who had never brooked authority of any sort. And since they would never set eyes on him again anyhow. . . .

He stepped boldly from his dark doorway and cat-footed it after the officer; he could get him easily before he reached the avenue. And then, with the next step, he stopped abruptly and ducked into the shadow. Two other dark figures had slipped from a doorway almost at the heels of the unsuspecting officer and were slinking quickly after him. Corrigan in his shadow smiled an ugly, twisted smile; he fancied he recognized the burlier of the two thugs as Sandbag Steve, and if old Steve took a crack at anybody he sure would do him up good.

There was no analysis of motives. With the sight of one of the representatives of authority, all his impersonal resentment had focused itself into a fierce personal anger, and it seemed to him that as long as the object of his anger "got it good an' proper," anybody else might do the job quite as effectively as himself. Here was a flash of the true gang spirit.

While he still smiled to himself the leaner of the two men came up with the officer. He jostled him so roughly as to throw him off his balance. As the officer staggered and turned in angry remonstrance, the other man leaped forward. The short, heavy canvas tube filled with sand and small shot swished in a swift curve and fell with a soft thud on the unprotected neck. Without a sound the officer dropped limp. The two thugs pounced upon him with well-rehearsed swiftness and dragged him into the blackness of a dark doorway.

The ugly smile on Corrigan's face took on an expression of doubt. Now that he had actually seen the assault committed, somehow it did not appeal to him quite so satisfactorily as he had thought—the old approved methods of gangdom struck him now as being quite a little slinking and cowardly. It seemed that in point of fact he had rather grown away from that gang spirit.

However, what in blazes had he to be squeamish about, he growled; and he strode forward to make himself known and to receive the glad hand of welcome back to the fold. He stepped boldly into the long, musty-smelling hallway, dim-lit by a single tiny wisp of gas flame. The two dark figures stooping over the third inert form turned suddenly and snarled like hyenas disturbed, and the big man's hand made a swift motion toward a back pocket. Corrigan stood confidently and grinned at them.

" 'Lo Steve," he greeted.

"What tha ——"

The big man's hand came slowly away from his hip as he straightened up and peered scowlingly into the other's face. Slowly there came recognition, and then, instead of the expected joyful greeting as an old ally:

"Corny Jim!—Git ta —— aht-a here! What youse hornin' in for?"

For a moment Corrigan was staggered. Why, Steve had been one of the boys, he had known him well. Then he stiffened with an indignant pride.

"Oh all right, if that's the way you feel about it." He turned to go and he had already taken a couple of steps down the hall, when the other man gripped Steve excitedly by the arm.

"What's matter widj-youse?" he hissed in angry surprise. "Y' throwin' it away? Dem Jacks jes paid off has a pile."

There was no attempt at concealment. What need? They were two to one and safe from interference.

The big man hesitated for an instant, then his habitual scowl deepened into the glare of intimidation and he advanced threateningly.

"Yeah," he growled with a stupid attempt to disguise his real intention. "Git ta —— aht-a here."

The sailor stood in wrathful amazement. That his own people, that the boys of the old gang should turn on him. . . It was against all the ethics of every teaching that

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he had absorbed during the last two years. It was the abyss of vileness. Why, his shipmates would stand by through all hell-fire! He stood speechless till they were upon him. The smaller man edged up to his other side. Then his wits returned.

HE KNEW their methods of old. Instantly he smashed a fist into the lean, rat-face and at the same time ducked. As he did so the deadly sand-bag swished through the grommet of his blue cap. On the instant, before it could be repeated, he leaped in and hugged the sand-bagger close. He was filled with a sudden maniac fury at this damnable piece of treachery. All the smoldering discontent of the last few months flared up into the red rage of the blow that he crashed into the other's splay-lipped mouth.

The big man ripped out a curse and tried to use his weapon again, but the wall against which he was pressed prevented a free swing, and Corrigan was familiar with the trick of it. He snuggled his head close on the other's shoulder and used a free hand to smash upward at the face again.

Sand-bag Steve swore foully; he saw the futility of his weapon in this sort of work. He stuffed it hurriedly into a gaping pocket to put himself on more even terms; then heaved the crushing arms from him with a sudden strain and grunted with the effort of the vicious short hook that he drove upward. Corrigan felt a terrific smash that dazed him, and the blood flowed from a long gash which ran from the temple to the eyebrow. The man used brass knuckles!

Corrigan's rage had been that of a maniac before, but the foulness of the thing now drove him berserk. He ducked his reeling head on to the other's breast-bone and strained with his great arms till he heard the ribs crack. It was a deadly hold and unbreakable. The burly Steve began to gasp in agony—and then Corrigan felt the desperate clawing of the other man at his back. Sand-bag Steve was aware of it too.

"Leg 'im Slim," he croaked. "Quick, 'r he's got me."

Corrigan remembered that trick too. It consisted of seizing an opponent by the ankles and tripping him. It would have been the end for him. He felt the clawing hands slipping down his legs, and then, just as they were about to take a grip, he kicked suddenly upward with all his force.

With fierce joy he felt his boot heel crush into the face with a mushy sound, and Slim reeled away with a low groan. But he had lost his balance with the effort. Steve gave a sudden heave and nearly threw him, and then they both staggered fighting down the narrow passage. A whirling arm tore the little gas-fixture from the wall and left them in pitch blackness. They stumbled over something which groaned again, and both fell with a crash to the floor. Instinctively they rolled apart.

Corrigan scrambled up on one knee and crouched alert, listening. The long hall was darker than the pit, but away to the right, dimly outlined against the faint glow from the door, he could distinguish the body of the officer. It seemed to move. Nothing lay between. By making a quick dash he could easily have escaped; but Corrigan would not have made a move to escape just then from a dozen thugs. He felt a wild exhilaration of battle. All that pent-up feeling of the past few months was working itself into each fierce punch that he put over.

And through it all there came the first inklings of a vague resolve that he would not leave the officer to be robbed by those filthy crooks, just for spite if for nothing else. In the blackness to the left he could hear the labored breathing of Steve; himself, he panted lightly, thanks, he remembered with a queer feeling, to his shipboard training. He lifted himself cautiously to both feet and began to creep silently to the other's position.

Somewhere far up the stairs, from what seemed to be the only tenanted flat, a door opened and a querulous woman's voice enquired what the —— the noise was about. But since everything now was silent, the door shut again with a slam which set the rickety stair-rails rattling up and down with echoing vibrations.

Corrigan took advantage of the sound to cover his own advance. He stepped quickly forward—and trod on a board which creaked with the startling effect of a pistol shot. Instantly he crouched low, and had the satisfaction of hearing a short rush and the crunch of metal knuckles into the wall just where his head would have been. The next instant they were at grips again and reeled down the hall once more.

Came another deadlock. Corrigan's whole endeavor was to keep a grip on the

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armored hand and to wear the other down. His splendid condition was beginning to tell to his advantage, when for the second time he felt the clawing of Slim at his back, weaker and more cautious; but dangerous enough, when added to the efforts of a powerful, foul-fighting brute in front.

This time Slim knew better than to try any "legging" tactics. Instead he reached over and wound his lean fingers round Corrigan's throat. He interlaced the fingers and dug the thumbs into the windpipe with vicious force. Corrigan's own hands were too desperately engaged in warding off those terrible brass knuckles to make any sort of attempt to break the grip. He fought madly to accomplish something, anything; but after a few minutes of agonized effort he felt himself slipping and he saw the green-and-blue lights begin to dance before his eyes in the blackness.

If only he had some sort of weapon to offset those deadly knuckles for just a second he could perhaps break that terrible hold and gain breathing-space. With the despairing thought an idea born of desperation came to him. As he had grappled with the big man he had felt every now and then the bulge of the sand-bag in his pocket. It was a desperate chance, but he was in desperate straits. With a heart-breaking strain he managed to tuck the deadly knuckled hand under his arm, leaving the other hand free for a moment to snatch at the pocket. By the grace of Providence the bag came away without catching in anything.

Corrigan's eye-balls were bulging now; but he collected himself for his last effort. Suddenly he loosed his grip of Steve and heaved himself backward on the other. Together they crashed up against the opposite wall, and then Corrigan swung out with all his remaining strength into the darkness in front of him. The bag swished through empty air!

Corrigan would have groaned if his throat had not been choked tight. Then he felt a hand groping over his chest to locate him. In another second that awful brass fist would come crashing into his face. He swung wildly again. Thud! The heavy bag fell on something solid with its full crushing weight, and the thud was followed immediately by the softer, knuckly sound of a body crumpling up on the floor.

Glory be! With hands free, to break Slim's choking grip was a matter of a fractional second. Corrigan sucked in a great whistling gasp of air and reeled into a clinch with him; together they staggered down the passageway. The officer was sitting up in a daze; friend or foe, he could not tell in the dimness, and he dared not think. He stretched out his foot and incontinently tripped them both.

They shot over his legs and sprawled out on to the stoop. Even the short rush through the passage, reeking though it did of gas, had revived Corrigan considerably—the thin-chested Slim was a toy in his big brown hands. Without hesitation or compunction he banged the narrow head against a stone step; and Slim lay out as inert as that other one in the passage.

Jim Corrigan straightened up shakily and leaned dizzily against the broken iron rail. For many seconds he did nothing but draw in great gasps of God-given air. Then, as his mind began to work with coherence, there surged through his whole being the glorious exhilaration of a great fight, well fought and nobly won. Battered and bruised though he was, the world seemed to him a good place to live in. All that burning discontent with life had vanished miraculously. He felt like a whole big man.

In the dim hallway the officer stirred again. Immediately Corrigan's thoughts flashed back to his own immediate circumstances. If he wanted to make a clear getaway, now was his time, before the lieutenant should recover sufficiently to call for assistance. Instinctively he looked in the direction of Saddler Street. For a long time he stood; and then slowly that twisted smile crept into his face, but this time it was full of bitterness. These were the people whom he had been thinking of as his own! This was what he had considered home. He turned slowly.

"Jeez," he kept muttering to himself.

He shook his head as though to wake himself out of a trance and stepped into the hallway to help his officer.

"Got to get outa here in a hurry, sir, before they wake up."

The officer got up shakily.

"Yes, thank you, I think I can walk now with a little assistance."

He leaned heavily on Corrigan's arm and together they gained the street. There, under a desolate lamp, he looked closely at

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him. His eyes narrowed characteristically.

"Hm! James Corrigan? Absent without leave. Hm!"

Corrigan made no reply. He felt that there just was no reply. Then:

"Shall I take you back to the ship, sir?"

"No Corrigan, no. I'll be all right. I have some business to attend to. I want you to get me to the avenue and call a taxi."

They proceeded without further remark in grim silence. In the avenue Corrigan hailed a taxi and put his officer inside. Then the officer spoke, slowly and incisively.

"Petty Officer Corrigan."

"Sir." Corrigan saluted and stood to a ragged attention.

"You will report yourself on board immediately as a defaulter."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Tomorrow morning you will come before a deck court. Since you are still in uniform your offense will be absence over leave. You will lose a day's pay for every hour of absence, and also your rating badge. Do you understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The answer was smart and prompt; but Corrigan winced at the mention of losing that badge which had meant nothing to him. The officer continued inexorably, discipline *must* be upheld.

"Now I am not calling a policeman to have you arrested. I am just relying on you to go. Do you quite understand that?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Very well then, that is all. Except that your rating *may* be returned to you at the discretion of your commanding officer; and —I'd like to shake hands with you."

There was no shamefacedness about Corrigan. He shook his officer's hand with respectful dignity and saluted stiffly again. The lieutenant returned the salute.

"Very well, you may go."

Petty Officer Corrigan went, the straightest way to the U. S. battleship *Texan*. And of all that "that blasted discipline" had done for him in two short years he sensed not one jot.

Author of "The World Next Door," "Jamie by Proxy," etc.

WITH an exclamation of disgust, the state fish and game commissioner turned in his swivel chair. Four times within the half-hour he had been interrupted. And he had closeted himself to study reports coming from a situation in the Berlin Mountains that was rapidly approaching a crisis.

"There's a man outside," announced the offending secretary, "pleasant to meet as a grizzly bear. Claims he's a Texas ranger. You knew his father in the prickly pear bottoms twenty-five years ago."

"His name?" snapped the commissioner.

"Tad Ashmunn. Says they call him "Wild-Cat" Ashmunn down in his country. You could place him from the name."

A startled frown replaced the annoyance

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on the game official's face. Nervously he pulled his stubby white mustache. The secretary continued:

"He's been in some scrape in New York. He's up here to ask your advice. Says he hasn't another acquaintance within twelve hundred miles who can help him."

"Didn't know a Texas ranger ever needed help," commented the commissioner. "Wonder if he's old Jasp Ashmunn's boy? Send him in."

The door reopened and a man entered. The fighting face of the official was a map of surprise, nervousness and anticipation as he turned to confirm his conjecture.

A weather-bronzed statue of a young man moved across. His locomotion was a lope —something like the stride of the mountain animal from which he derived his nickname, The most cursory glance told the commissioner he was bred of that tribe of American southwesterners who live strong, ride hard and shoot straight. His iron jaw, his firm tread and battling eye announced him from afar. He was the original Texas edition of the "gentleman unafraid."

The ranger took the commissioner's hand. He did not fuss with the brim of the huge sombrero. He did not allow his gaze to wander at random about the commissioner's private office. He stood squarely, controlling every muscle, a man of splendid poise, the concentrated essence of all the admirable traits of his species combined in one positive personality, constituted for action and accustomed to get it.

"You're Hal Sampson," announced the Texan.

He said it quietly, positively. He looked the commissioner squarely in the eye, made the statement, and it settled the matter.

He continued—

"You lived in Lone Horse, Texas, a number of years ago."

"Yes," admitted the older man. "You must be the son of old Jasper Ashmunn."

The ranger signified the official was correct and the latter indicated a chair. The Westerner did not drop his hat on the rug. He laid it down carefully, deliberately. Every motion was careful, deliberate.

Volunteered the commissioner—

"I left Lone Horse in the nineties. There was a chap named MacIntosh that got periodically drunk. Each time he thought he had a grievance. That grievance was particularly against me. So he took after me with a gun. On account of his motherless three kids, I couldn't justify shooting it out. I finally concluded I'd present him the place, free and unencumbered of my personality."

"I've heard my father tell the story," confirmed the ranger. He refused the game man's black cigar, preferring brown cigarets which he rolled himself.

"I have regretted many times since," went on the commissioner, "that correspondence with your family stopped. But it was too confounded one-sided. Your dad could use a gun to get a bad man at a quarter-mile. But he couldn't use a pen for anything but to pick his teeth."

"You left Lone Horse in a hurry?"

The commissioner smiled.

"This chap MacIntosh was drunk as usual on the afternoon I concluded to leave. I kept out of his way until the evening train. I was a moral man in those days and slept with one eye on the fifth commandment. All the same, Mac got three shots at me. If a thoughtful soul hadn't appreciated what I was doing for Mac's family and substituted blanks for the bullets in his gun, I'd have given the air a final kick, right there on the station platform. I owe the man who changed those bullets an account I've never been able to square. He died shortly after. Now, tell me how you discovered me and what brings you to New England?"

"My uncle Joe remembered you was a game-cheif. If I came near, I was told to look you up. But that ain't why I did it so suddenly. Hal Sampson, I'm in trouble."

"My time's all yours," said the commissioner. "Go ahead."

Abruptly the ranger began with:

"Hal Sampson—it's a woman!"

MAKING the statement, the ranger stared hard at the other, as though expecting him to contradict it with gymnastics or profanity. The commissioner's face contracted in a quiet smile of amusement. It angered the Texan. Anger made him sarcastic, at his own expense.

He said:

"You see, Hal Sampson, it's like this: Me, I'm down there among the boys eternally ridin' the pear flats and waitin' for the President to put a bounty o' twenty-five cents a nose on Mexicans so we rangers would have some incentive for settlin' the border situation.

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"At twenty-nine years o' age, Hal Sampson, I becomes took suddenly with lonesomeness and domesticity in my sentiments. You-all know how it might be—yearnin' for a home and a girl, and chairs with tidies on 'em, and a what-not in the parlor. But bein' here today and gone tomorrer on account o' the service, I ain' exactly had time to primp in best bib-and-tucker and spend regular weekly evenin's gushin' sickenin' sentiment into the shell-like ear o' no female.

"Waal, I fights off this yearnin' for an evenin' newspaper and grocery bills and suspenders till I'm just natcherly mellow and ripe for a little advertisement in the corner o' a family story-paper I picks up in San Antony.

"Seems there's a company in New York known as the Queen o' Hearts Matrimonial Agency. They makes a business o' writin' to and fro over the earth seekin' whom they might join in the holy bonds o' matrimony. You sent 'em your photograph at the time you made application. In return, they sent you a couple o' dozen female customers reproduced on picture post-cards. You took your choice, returnin' the quinces.

"Then you kept that photograph to gush over, and say fool language at, and imagine home-made flapjacks goin' into that beautiful mouth across the breakfast table from you on Sunday mornin's. Meantime you understood that your photograph was sent in turn to the lady you'd honored, along with the question: 'Take a look at that and tell us, could you learn to love it?'

"Waal, I goes into a picture-takin' place and has my three-days' growth o' beard reproduced on a picture postcard. Partly in earnest and partly for the adventure in the things, I sends it on. I gives a fairly accurate history o' my young life, not omittin' the seventeen men I'd killed in pursuit o' official duties—aimin' to make myself attractive to the lady and as how she could rely on such a husband for protection.

"Two weeks slips into the soul. I gets a letter from New York sayin' my face has been received. Enclosed would I please find twenty-four candidates for Hymen's Halter. Would I select the one that punched out my eyes with her gorgeousness and return the balance promptly. Other gents is waitin'.

"I monkey-fools round for a day, communin' with the highest sentiments o' the human soul and them picture post-cards. Then in a little room behind a south Texas bar, I decides on my affinity. Speakin' in simile and metaphor, Hal Sampson, I chooses a pippin.

"She's a whale o' a female. She's got a shape like that statuary sometimes allowed in the background o' motion pictures. The photograph shows a waist open at a throat that's plump as a partridge. Her heavy golden hair is blowin' like she was out in a nor'easter. Her hands is on her hips, her sleeves is rolled back to dimpled elbows and she looks hale and hearty enough to bull-dog a steer, stir an angel cake or break a Texas bushwhacker's heart.

"But a peculiar feature o' the Queen o' Hearts Matrimonial Agency's business is this: They didn't let you correspond with your lady direct. Not until you'd paid your spondulicks. And as most folks wouldn't pay until they'd made mutual acquaintances and got their bearin's satisfactory with the other party, you had to correspond with a number.

"The girl I'd drawed was number fourteen-hundred-and-seventy-three. It was considerable startlin' stunt to write the tenderest sentiments o' the human heart to figures. Think o' pennin' such lofty aspirations as: 'Darlin' Fourteen-hundred-seventy-three, won't you consider a proposition to stick your knees under my dinin' table, the purpose bein' matrimony;' or, 'I am thinkin' o' you tonight, dearest, sweetest and best Fourteen-seventy-three, and wonderin' if you are happy.' And signin' it: 'Your ever lovin', true and faithful, Number 688.' It would get on your nerves after a while. Reminded me o' two crooks concoctin' pre-matrimonial mush from the bars o' a penitentiary.

"As I gets deeper and deeper into the mazes o' affection, I begins to have a powerful longin' to know whether her name is Rosie or just plain Mary Jane, or whether it's one o' them high-flown monickers like Amethysta, or Bernice, or Formaldehyde. I wants to know whether she resides on Riverside Drive or Hog-Run in Possum Trot. I writes to the company and tells 'em so. 'All right,' they replies. 'Come across with the spondulicks.' So I sends 'em a hundred.

"I waits patiently for two months. I don't hear nothin'. Then I commences

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usin' the mails with intent to insult. 'Where's the information for which I paid my emoluments?' says I in print. But never an answer do I get.

"Finally I was like a bronco that's been chewin' loco. I goes to the chief and gets permission for a month off to travel to New York on the cars and find out if there's crooked work.

"I found the agency. It was located in one room off Broadway—on a house all stuck up with signs o' second-rate furriers, cut-rate dentists and greasy ladies who tell your fortune.

"I goes in and what do I find? I find a little under-sized man in chin whiskers, dressed like a parson, sittin' with his head in his hands. He's alone. He looks as melancholy as a Summer amusement park in a Monday-mornin' drizzle. I asks him if he's the proprietor. He says he was. I asks him what has he done with my hundred. At that he commences to wail like he was Sodom and had just come back from the funeral o' his dear departed wife, Gomorrah.

"I gets him by the chest. I gives him a vision o' the Promised Land. That quiets him a bit. He says he'll be human and explain. There's been a woman workin' the business with him, accordin' to his explanation, and the day after my hundred arrived, they'd had words. While he'd been out to lunch, she'd taken all the cash in the treasury, most o' the company's correspondence and records so'd he couldn't do business. Then she'd flew the coop. I worried it out o' him that there had been profits due her and she wouldn't return with the records so the firm could go on doin' business till he'd come across with about a hundred more than she'd already got.

"'Then you don't know the name o' this girl I'm stuck on,' says I.

"He swore that he didn't.

"'Do you know where your female partner is hidin'?' says I.

"He said she might be located. He had his suspicions. But what was the use? He simply didn't have the cash. She'd scuttled him clean. And I wasn't the only man whose remittance she'd taken.

"I see the poor duffer was in Dutch. I says: 'I have money left. If I give you another hundred, would you get in touch with this woman and find out my girl's name and address?' If a girl ain't worth two hundred plunks, she ain't worth marryin', thinks I.

"He says so mournful and inoffensively that he thought he might be able to negotiate it, if I'd stake him, that I apologized for the way I'd used my hands to upset him. So I gives him the money, takes his receipt and agrees to return the followin' mornin'.

"I returns the followin' mornin'. The office is open so I waits. I waits all day. I comes the next day and the next. At the end o' the third day I was hot enough to shoot the jets off the gas pipes and never extinguish the flame. At the end o' the fourth, it was plain he wasn't comin' back. He'd skinned me for another hundred and also flew the coop.

"When I thought how I'd been played Jonah twice, I was so crazy mad that I commenced grabbin' things and heavin' 'em through the window. I'd thrown out a couple o' chairs and an ice-water tank, when three policemen jams the doorway.

"'What's the idea?' one roars.

"'Oh,' says I, 'I've bought the place and I'm merely movin' out.' He grabs me before any one is killed by fallin' furniture.

"'You're pinched!' says he.

"I tried to explain. He told me to save my troubles for the sergeant. I went along peaceable, glad there was somebody somewhere who could give me a steer on this agency business.

"'It's Doc Boubler and his woman Fifi at their matrimonial game again,' says the desk-man. 'They're due to get rounded up soon by the post-office inspectors.'

"Then he told me how they worked up bliss between lonesome fellers and sentimental girls and skippin' when the fellers came across for the identity o' their sweethearts, or with cash for the female's transportation.

"'If you'll stand back o' a complaint,' says the police officer, 'the secret service men'll get busy and round them crooks up.'

"'Will it get me my girl?' I wants to know.

"But the police feller says he doubts it. He says he doubts if my girl ever got a line o' my correspondence. He says the doc and his woman got most o' their photographs for their business by goin' on picture-takin' trips through the north part o' the State and New England, snappin' males or females as they might be short o' pictures. They faked they was artists wantin'

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pictures to color and all that sort o' thing. Most any male or female hick would pose on promise o' a photograph. Said he'd known o' cases where they'd taken orders for the pictures and actually filled 'em, but mostly it was to supply their private art gallery for them o' the opposite sex given to mopin' under a June moon. Said the male correspondence was usually dumped in the agency waste-basket and their letters was answered by Fifi, the Doc's woman. She knew how to work on a love-sick feller's feelin's and employ syllables that would bring things to a focus.

"Waal, Hal Sampson, it sure was some blow in the phiz to hear that I'd been writin' letters to a woman that made a business o' it in New York. So here I am, Hal Sampson. When I learned how near New England was to New York—as we reckon miles in Texas—I thought I'd run up and see what you thought o' standin' back o' a complaint; how much notoriety there'd be to get back to the boys in Texas; and if there might be any other way o' locatin' my woman."

"Let's see the picture," said the commissioner with amused tolerance. "Maybe there's marks or clues on it, to show where it was taken."

With customary serious deliberation, the ranger brought out his wallet. He relinquished the photograph.

The instant the commissioner looked at the strong, picturesque woman's figure with its rustic background, he started forward in his chair.

"Do you blame me for thinkin' much o' her?" demanded the Texan.

"Ashmunn," cried the elder man, "is this the woman that's fussed you up?"

The tone of his voice caused the younger man to glance at his friend with a frown. But he answered quietly in the affirmative.

"Wait here a minute," ordered the game official.

II

COMMISSIONER SAMPSON left his office. He traversed a long corridor. At a door at the further end marked "Attorney-General," he entered.

A heavy-set, mustache-dyed man was seated at the big desk.

"Tom," ordered Sampson, "look at that picture closely and tell me everything you see."

"I see considerable girl."

"Yes, I know. But I don't mean the girl. I mean, do you recognize anything in that picture anywhere that would lead you to determine where the thing might have been snapped."

"It was taken out-of-doors," commented the attorney. "The background is rather hazy on account of getting the focus on the main figure. It looks like hills in the back."

"Yes," said the commissioner, "hills is right. Look again, Tom. When you and I were up in the Berlin mountains last week did we see anything that looks familiar in that picture."

"Thunder, *yes*!" exclaimed the commissioner. "I get you now. You mean the Old Man of the Mountains!"

"Then you do see it, too!" asked the commissioner.

"It's hazy," the other stated. "But the rise of the skyline over the girl's left shoulder resembles it mighty close."

Sampson replied:

"It looks like that particular mountain top so confounded close that you can call off sending those men from the militia up there tomorrow morning. I've got a cactus-eating giant upstairs who'll be glad to go instead. He's fallen in love with this woman through her photograph, taken by a wandering photographer up through this part of New England, who went through snapping pictures to use in a fake matrimonial-agency game. He don't know who the girl is no more'n I do. But we'll see if the reputation of the Texas rangers still holds. If that's the Old Man of the Mountains with its queer peak inserted for picturesque effect over the girl's shoulder, that girl he wants is somewhere up around the Lost Village. I'll send him up there on the chance that he may find her. Meanwhile he may be able to do more toward rounding up the Lost Village gang than the others have been able to accomplish."

Sampson returned to his office.

In the quiet voice with which a certain type of men would announce a world-catastrophe, he said:

"Ashmunn, I think I know the locality where this strange girl may live."

"What?"

"I can't exactly tell you who, where nor what she is. I don't know. All I can do is offer you an opportunity to find out for yourself. This picture was taken with the girl outdoors apparently just as the camera

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man came upon her. He took the picture so as to get in some art—there's a mountain top here that looks mighty like a certain peak with which this office is familiar, known as Old Man of the Mountains. I'm going to make you a proposition that will take you up to those mountains. Then you can show your photograph to the natives and maybe locate your woman. Does it listen good?"

"It does. What kind o' job is it?"

"Come with me."

Sampson led the way to a room adjoining. It was filled with tables holding maps and blue-prints. About the walls were shelves containing pamphlets, blanks and game literature. Along the south wall on the floor, twelve small covered tubs were ranged beneath the big double windows.

Said Sampson:

"You see these tubs? Take off a cover. Tell me what's in them." The ranger obeyed.

"Butter!" said he.

"Sure of it?" demanded the commissioner.

He picked up a heavy ferrule. Into the bright yellow surface of the butter he dug it. A few inches beneath the surface the implement struck something which impeded its progress. Sampson dug out great chunks of the product. Then he ran in his fingers and pulled out a dark feathered object.

"Chicken!" ejaculated the ranger.

"Chicken?" laughed the commissioner. "Mr. Texan, did you ever see a chicken with such a tuft?"

"Why, it's—it's a partridge!" exclaimed Ashmunn. "What the deuce is partridge doin' in there? The tub is full!"

Sampson dropped the bird and wiped his fingers.

"For the past two years," said he, "this department has known that big quantities of wild game birds were being taken out of season by snaring and shooting in the Berlin Mountains. There's one locality in particular down there that's called the Lost Village. It's composed of-run-down stock who make their living by a little farming, a little dairying, and a very great amount of shooting deer out of season and snaring game birds for the New York markets.

"We've got evidence enough to convict a townful. Our men spent days in that locality destroying their little partridge fences that run up and down the ravines. They made maps of the locality, entered houses, ransacked them, brought back various kinds of evidence but they didn't make arrests till they'd discovered how the birds were being smuggled from the State.

"A few weeks ago a dairy train was wrecked between Troy and Albany. When the débris was being cleared, the method lay exposed. They were packing the bottom of their firkins with partridge. The tops were filled with butter and the whole shipped as butter.

"Then we started men out to make arrests. We wanted four people who live in the Lost Village.

"First I ordered the local wardens to proceed. But they refused. You see, these farmers believe they can shoot or take anything on their own land, wild or tame, regardless of the season. When two men from here were sent up after those we wanted, they were tarred, feathered and run out of the place on a rail. I sent four more. They were stripped of their clothing, tied to trees and left overnight to the mercy of the mosquitoes. I sent another squad. They had a gun-fight like a dime novel. Two of them were badly hit. Tomorrow we were to send some of the militia up there and get those four or put the place under martial law.

"Now this has occurred to me: When I was in Texas, one ranger was as good as fifty ordinary Eastern men. Combined with the fact that there's one thousand dollars I can get you for bringing those fellows out, if you will swear in as deputy warden, there's the chance of discovering if my intuition about the origin of that picture is correct and your girl lives somewhere up in that territory. Now then, Wild-Cat Ashmunn, what do you say? Will you risk having your fool head blown off for the sake of one thousand cash and meeting this girl you want to marry?"

The ranger returned to the other office. He picked up his sombrero. There was a smile on his hard lips and a battle-glint in his eye.

"Get me mounted on the proper hawss," said he, "give me them maps o' the territory—then let me at 'em!"

III

TWO days later the man from Texas, who from the ferocity and deadliness of his attacks in the ranger service was called Wild-Cat Ashmunn, had been sworn in as deputy warden.

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Now he rode through the Berlin mountains in the hush of the droning afternoon.

A search of the city had provided a huge black horse to his approval. His saddle was new. It creaked disgracefully. The rope he had oiled and prepared himself. The only thing among all his accouterments of solitary campaigning with which he felt thoroughly familiar and at home, was the six-gun on his hip. He had brought it from Texas in his bag.

It was an incongruous but a striking picture which he made in the New England country as his khaki dress, enlivened by the flashy scarf and shirt and the sun glinting on cartridge-belt, holster-buckles and gun-butt, passed through the Summer foliage.

He had left the more timid warden who had feared to accompany him higher into the hills, hours before. Silence now reigned in the virgin woods where he rode alone. It was broken only by the creaking of his saddle, the snapping of dead leaves under foot, the thrashing of blackberry vine against his stirrup, or the long swinging singsong of the huge bluebottles, winging through the heated quiet of the hills.

Accustomed on the deserts of the Southwest to any disarrangement of the ground indicating the track of men, the ranger had experienced small difficulty tracing the partridge fences up and down the ravines. According to instructions, too, he had destroyed them as he traveled. They were foot-high interlacings of twigs and brush which continued up and down for mile after mile, interspersed at irregular intervals with birch-trees snares. For it is a peculiarity of the partridge that he will walk behind these fences for a long distance seeking an opening before attempting to scramble or fly over them—unless alarmed.

Ashmunn had stopped to allow his horse to drink at a mountain brook, when distinctly over the brittle flooring of forest leaves, came the steady pat!—pat!—pat! of footsteps. It was only a partridge coming over the dry woods and leaves. But the forest acoustics magnified the sound till it seemed like a human foot-tread.

The ranger appeared under the low-hung branches of the spruces to watch the bird.

As he watched, there happened a sudden snap, a whipping of leaves, the whir of air and a fury of feathers. In an instant the frantic partridge had been lifted from the ground, one of its feet securely entangled in a wire loop that now hung from an unleashed birch-tree. In the air the bird now fluttered and fought. It used every effort in power of feet and wings to regain its liberty.

Ashmunn was about to dismount and go to its assistance when distinctly he heard a human voice.

"Come on, pop! Over this way! It was a fat one and he flew up the hill. We'll look in the next loop, anyhow, pop!"

Two people were at the bottom of the ravine, coming up. The ranger left the bird fighting the air, wheeled his horse until they were screened by the bushes and waited.

The thrashing of brush, rattle of stones and snapping of twigs showed the speaker was climbing rapidly toward him. He was followed by a person less agile and given to more abusive profanity.

They came into view.

There was a long angular young fellow, clothed in dirty sweater, overalls and rubber boots. A small and ill-shaped head was covered with a battered derby hat. Behind, was a stout middle-aged man, overalls tucked into heavy leather boots, vest unbuttoned in front and head covered with a faded old straw hat.

The young man carried a rifle of small bore. The other had no weapon. But a half-dozen plump partridges with necks twisted and feet tied together, hung by a string from his shoulder.

The young man saw the struggling bird first. He came forward swiftly. Seizing the partridge, he jerked it loose. With a twist he wrung its neck. The elder man swung the birds to the dead leaves and began adding it to their illegal collection.

With a pull on his rein and a dig of his spurs, the ranger was out of the brush.

"Drop those birds!" he ordered. "Put up your hands!"

Both men turned to behold a Western cow-puncher—apparently dropped from the cloudless heavens—covering them with the business end of a six-gun. It startled the pair more than being apprehended in illegally taking the game.

"I reckon," commented Ashmunn, "I've caught you with the goods."

The young man's hands came down.

"Oh, you're only another brand o' game warden!" he exclaimed. His voice carried a tone of disgust. "I thought first you was

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one o' them Western outlaws, maybe escaped East like it tells about in Buffalo Bill!"

"*Put up those hands!*" ordered Ashmunn.

Men with more brains would have appreciated the ranger's tone and obeyed while the obeying was good.

"Go plumb to ——!" the young man retorted. "I don't put up my hands for no game warden on my own land. We own this side the mountain. If partridges come on it, we got a right to what's on our property."

"Put up your hands and march—ahead o' me!" commanded the ranger.

"You make me!" the other retorted.

Purple anger flooded the Texan's face at the taunt. For a moment he sat speechlessly in surprise. Murderers, train-robbers and cattle-thieves of the Southwest would hardly have voiced such a sentiment to one of Ashmunn's calling. Only the man's ignorance or the Texan's self-control, prevented an accident.

The ranger swung from his horse. He approached the pair with his gun held in front.

The young man snickered a sickly laugh.

"Oh, you wouldn't shoot me—and we both know it!" he reminded the Westerner. "It'd be murder. I ain't that easily scared."

"But I can do something just as good!" the ranger retorted.

He walked to the young man. A fist like the butt-end of a small tree came upward. It connected under the young man's chin. Three inches off the ground he was raised. He dropped senseless on the leaves.

The father started for the rifle. Before he reached it, the ranger had swung about, delivered a second blow and rocked the old man's head. With a face turning pasty-white, he slid limply on the prostrate body of his son.

The Texan grunted in satisfaction.

He went to the saddle and secured his rope. With expert knots he fastened the hands of both men behind, allowing only enough space for them to walk conveniently. When he had made the other end secure at his saddle-horn, he went to the brook and filled his big hat with water. He drowned their faces it in and they coughed and groaned as they regained consciousness.

"Get up!" ordered the Texan. "Walk! If you don't choose to walk you'll be dragged. And the sensation ain't pleasant."

"What happened to me anyhow?" whimpered the young man.

"Oh," retorted Ashmunn, swinging into his saddle, "somehow the idee got into your noodle that you could feaze a chap that's spent his life bringin' in bad men that'd eat you at a single gulp. That'll be all from you! This ain't no Questions-and-Answers Department o' no family story-paper. You march!"

BELOW in the valley lay the hamlet of Bear Creek, colloquially known as the Lost Village.

Their coming into the Lost Village created a sensation. An angular boy in a buckboard met them as they turned from the forest on to a weed-grown road. The boy stopped his horse, arose, and emitted two whoops. Then he turned the animal and raced the crazy rig back toward the village.

Ashmunn followed his road. The three reached the hamlet. The Texan sat his horse straight as an iron statue. His strange attire, his accouterments of solitary camping and self-defense, his poise and the deadly capability displayed in the rigid alertness of head and torso, combined with the glances of his eagle-eye which noted every difficulty into which he was riding, created panic among the washed-out, gone-to-seed male stock of the village. Like companions in a common predicament, they sought protection in a knot before the general store.

There were several sawed-off rifles and shotguns in evidence. The crowd was not strong on keeping them from sight.

Ashmunn stopped and faced a lank individual consisting principally of whiskers and shotgun. The native spoke first.

"Who be you?" he demanded.

"I'm a Texas ranger! I'm here to arrest four men. They violated the game laws. I reckon that addin' these here two, it's goin' to be six. I caught 'em redhanded. Where's the sheriff or constable in this place?"

The crowd shifted uneasily. A Texas ranger! They were neither so land-locked nor provincial but that some among them had heard of the mounted police of the American Southwest. The words were magical to blanch faces.

"I reckon I'm the constable here," retorted the first speaker. "If there be any arrestin' to be done, I'm the man authorized

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to do it. Suppose you let Hen and Sig go. In this here community we can run our own affairs without the assistance o' no State or strangers."

"Then it's evident," declared Wild-Cat, "that you're in league also with these law-breakers. Or else you lack moral stamina to enforce the law you've sworn to see obeyed. In either case you're a —— coward. And if I find that I'm correct, this place will be sheriffless within twenty-four hours!"

"You mean you'll arrest *me?*"

"I will!"

In the iron cast of his hard face, his positive voice, the human trophies tied like animals to his saddle-horn, there was small reason for the crowd to doubt that a superman had suddenly appeared in their midst who was perfectly capable of doing all that he threatened. But the self-styled sheriff had his position to maintain.

He relied more on nerve than discretion when he said:

"I reckon you see there's shotguns in evidence. Ain't nothin' to hold one o' them from explodin' and blowin' you full o' holes, o' course."

"It won't be healthy for the white-livered, law-breakin' gutter-snipe that tries it!" declared the ranger.

A shudder passed through the crowd. A man—single-handed, with no protection but a solitary six-gun and his dynamic personality, riding up and facing that crowd, calling them cowards, law-breakers and gutter-snipes, threatening to arrest their sheriff, and declaring it wouldn't be healthy for any one in the community to attempt his murder—filled every listener with dread. It was superhuman. Something in the newcomer's size, physique, words and attitude, armored him with strange invulnerability. They quailed before him.

The ranger, who knew the value of utter fearlessness in dealing with this type of people, said:

"Who's your head man in this place? Have you no mayor, or president, or selectman or nothin'?"

The head native ignored the question.

"You know, o' course," said he, "that the last chap that came into this town takin' prisoners, was rid out o' the corporate limits on a rail. There war tar and the vitals o' sleepin' arrangements stuck to him also."

The ranger jerked his horse and faced the speaker.

"Did I understand you to say," he demanded, "somethin' about tarrin' and featherin'—havin' possible reference to me?"

The other man chanced to lift his glance and encounter the eye of the Texan.

"No, sir!" he exclaimed hurriedly.

"Answer my question!" ordered Ashmunn. "I ain't——"

The ranger's voice stuck in his throat.

In the crowd, as his gaze roamed over each hostile face, he saw a countenance that sent his heart hammering itself out of plumb in his breast, that deepened the bronze of his skin, and dropped his jaw in stunned amazement.

Dimly he heard the sheriff replying. The man said:

"I kinder reckon, Megg, seein' them is your men-folks, that you'd be the proper person to answer for us."

IN THE crowd was a woman. Wild Cat had not recognized her at first because of the man's coat and hat. But one of the men now moved aside and the ranger saw her dressed in short, tough walking skirt that bore the marks of a distant mail-order house. Boots from similar origin were laced high upon her ankles. Over a flannel waist had been drawn a man's coat, and a man's hat of soft black felt was pinned on a maze of unruly golden hair and turned back from the forehead.

The color came and left the ranger's face as he stared at this Amazon of a woman whose photograph had brought him twelve hundred miles across the United States. She was big of body, athletic and somewhat mannish in her movements. Yet she possessed a stunning beauty of face and form occasionally encountered by the law of averages in the New England mountains. For an instant the Texan experienced the bashful man's impulse to flee. Then as quickly it was gone. Remembering his position and its danger, he did not permit it to come again.

The woman came slowly forward at the invitation, for a time saying nothing. She stood inventorying the ranger's magnificent figure, sitting so high and dominant on the beautiful black horse.

Then she shoved back the mannish coat. She placed strong capable hands upon her hips. The motion brought into view a cartridge-belt, choked with ammunition. Hanging from it was a long, sinister holster

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showing beneath the flap the deadly black butt of a heavy army revolver.

"What you reckon you're doin' with my dad and brother Hen?" she demanded.

Her dad!

The ranger's tongue was suddenly seized with paralysis. It seemed strange that the girl of his many lonely hours of dreaming on the Texas border should be standing but a few feet away, so much a stranger and so hostile.

And these two—law-breakers were her father and her brother!

Before the Texan could decide on a suitable reply, some one whispered hoarsely from the crowd:

"He's a Texas ranger, Megg. The State's sent him here to arrest the bunch of us!"

Astonishment replaced the frown on the hard, beautiful face of the Lost Village girl.

"A Texas ranger! Arrest the bunch of us? How?"

"Shut up!" Ashmunn ordered the man who would have replied. "I'm the boss here," said he, "and so long as I'm in this village I intend to remain so. I can do whatever talkin' is necessary for myself." With an effort of will he turned to the girl. "Are these really your folks?" he demanded.

She nodded in angry confirmation. Then she demanded:

"Where's your men?"

Said he—

"I don't need any men—for what I got to do."

"You mean you rode into this place alone—this place that's an armed camp against game wardens—that your fool head ain't been blowed off—that you expect to boss it this way—and take out prisoners?"

"I do!"

"Are you crazy?"

"I haven't seen anything human here that I'm afraid of, yet," he said.

"And you don't think you're goin' to need help gettin' dad and Hen and the rest o' whom you might desire, out of the place?"

"I reckon if I should need help, I know who to call on."

"Who might you think that would be?"

"Yourself!"

The girl caught her breath. The color slowly left her features.

"Me? Why, I'm——"

Then she seemed to lose all control of herself at the admission she had come near to making. One hand crept down to her holster. She drew out the long beautiful black weapon. Very slowly she drew a bead on her man. Then she cocked the trigger.

Through narrowed but steady lids, hands resting easily on the horn of his saddle, making no move at protection or retaliation, the big Texan watched her.

"Waal," he demanded finally, "what's a woman doin' with a cannon like that?"

"This woman—might use it—to kill you!" the girl replied.

"Fiddlesticks!" returned the ranger.

HE SWUNG off his big horse.

Nothing happened.

He came around and walked up to the woman. The muzzle of the deadly gun began to travel in circles. The woman looked upon the magnificent specimen of manhood approaching her. There was no sign of fear in eyes, voice nor manner. And—she could not bring herself to do the deed she had threatened.

As though the treacherous thing were but a wooden toy, the ranger grasped the wrist which held the gun. He turned her hand. The gun pointed in the direction of the crowd and they scattered in terror. He said to her, softly and curtly;

"Drop it!"

She looked into his eyes. Her own glance fell.

She dropped it.

The ranger left it lying in the sand.

The crowd had drawn far enough away so that the Texan could speak without being heard by them. Ashmunn still held her wrist, but not with his first vise-like grip. After a while, the girl turned her eyes back to his face. Admiration, slight but positive, lusked in their blue-gray depths. They were a magnificent couple, standing face to face in the afternoon sunshine.

Ashmunn said:

"Miss—I've some things I want to say to you; it ain't about game business, either. It's—it's just about yourself. Reckon it's to your advantage to hear me talk. But first, I'm in a delicate situation that's got to be settled. Have you any influence with this scum?"

"I did have," she admitted. "You made me drop my gun. You've taken it away—passed it along to yourself."

"If all it relied on was a gun," Ashmunn replied, "it warn't much influence. You

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might tell 'em, however, to behave themselves till you and me has had some talk. Do you live hereabouts?"

"Reckon I do."

"We'll go there."

"Reckon we won't!"

A quick thought flashed through the ranger's mind. He decided on a long chance.

"Too many butter-tubs piled about the premises?" said he.

Startled fright broke over the woman's face. Concealment was useless.

"What do you know about that?" she faltered.

He pressed his advantage.

"Enough," said he. "And I may know more—than enough. Better let me have my say."

"Who are you, anyhow?" she blurted out. "You—you ain't human!"

"That's just what I'm aimin' to tell you," said the ranger. "Give me a little privacy—and the chance."

The crowd witnessed a strange spectacle.

Megg Bolton, colloquially known as "Scalawag" Megg, walked downheaded and somewhat shamefacedly on one side the great black horse. On the other marched two men, shackled like animals. Above and between sat the straight, calm, fearless figure of the man who had awed a community into submission by his carriage, his eye and his voice.

And he had made Scalawag Megg drop her gun—Scalawag Megg, reputed to be afraid of neither man, God nor devil.

They left the main thoroughfare and turned off on a country road. They crossed a bridge by a tumble-down gristmill. They mounted a hill to where a dilapidated old farmhouse battled against the years of mountain weather.

An empty corn-crib stood on one side the cluttered yard. It required but a moment for the Texan to recognize its value as a place of security for his first two prisoners. He untied one end of the rope from the horn, and dismounted. Clutching them by their necks, he banged their heads together by way of persuasion to mount the steps in a hurry. Blaspheming, they fell headlong on to the floor. The ranger made certain they could not untie their hands. He came out and fastened the door securely.

"You can come into the kitchen," said the woman. "We live here alone—dad and Hen and I."

A strange sensation overcame the ranger when at last he found himself with the girl he had traveled so many miles to meet.

"Miss," began Ashmunn, "that picture's yours, ain't it?" He drew from his wallet the famous photograph.

The woman took the reproduction of herself. Blank astonishment was written in every line of her face. Her lips moved once or twice to reply. Twice, too, she moved her eyes from the picture up to the ranger's face and back.

"Where—where did you get that picture?" she finally said hoarsely.

"You admit that it's you."

"It must be me—yes, it is me. But I never saw it before." She looked out of the window for a time, then back again at the picture, the expression of her eyes unchanging. "It must be—why, it must be the picture that camera feller and the woman took o' me the day he run across me up on Bald Mountain."

"With Old Man o' the Mountains behind you in the distance?"

"Why—er, yes—that certainly is the Old Man behind me. But I didn't know nothin' about it bein' there, me facin' away from it. He said if I'd consent to havin' my picture took, he'd send me samples and I could buy some if they pleased me. I ain't never heard a word from him, that day till this."

"What kind o' chap was he, miss?"

"A little shriveled up man. Looked more like a preacher than a picture-takin' feller. And he had a woman with him dressed like the pictures of actresses in the magazines."

"Then—then you never wrote to no matrimonial agency at all?" quavered the ranger.

The girl did not understand.

"You never advertised for no husband? You never got a line o' all them letters I been writin' you?"

A deep wrinkle of perplexity suddenly sank in the girl's forehead.

"You been writin' letters to—*me!*" she repeated. "What are you talkin' about, anyhow?"

"Waal, I'm dummed!" exclaimed Ashmunn, as the full import of the realization struck him. "I sure have been the ripe and mellow 'come-on' for this agency game—two hundred bucks o' perfectly spendable

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spondulicks, to say nothin' o' the sums I've squandered for stationery and stamps. Can you beat it?"

"Are you crazy?" demanded the girl. "How did you come by this picture? What's all this talk about an agency, anyhow? Agency for what?"

"Listen, miss," said Wild-Cat. "I'll tell you why I'm here."

HE TOLD her, omitting nothing. The woman heard him to the end, her face often changing color and her plump bosom heaving. At times there were tears in her eyes. She averted her face. She looked off across the mountains with her back toward him. After all, she was only a woman.

When he had concluded, she said in a low voice, yet not unmixed with bitterness:

"You're the nerviest feller I ever heard tell of. This part o' the country don't breed 'em with courage like yours. What's more, I reckon you're on the level. Since you been frank with me, I'll be the same with you.

"Do you know why, back there at the store, Old Hastings said I'd better do the talkin' for the bunch? It wasn't because you had dad and Hen in tow. It's because it's been me that's roused local folks up over this game-takin' business and teachin' 'em that what's on their own land—wild or tame—is their'n. And I done it—and I done it—because—because—it was revenge——"

"Revenge!" exclaimed the astonished ranger. "Revenge for what?"

The woman answered with a question:

"Do you know why I didn't shoot you when you came at me back there in front o' that crowd? It was because you walked up to me with just your bare hands and your gun in its place on your hip. If you'd covered me, it'd probably been a shootin' scrap. The chances are that I'd punctured you cold. I did it once to a warden—I did it once—and they—got me! That," she blurted out vehemently, "is why I been proddin' these folks up to revenge."

"You mean you killed a man?"

"No. I didn't kill him. But I made such a horrible example o' him that they sent me up—made me do time.

"I'm tellin' you this so you'll know just what the game is you're playin'—and the stake. No decent man'll have a woman that's been in the pen. And I won't have this scum that's bred back here in the hills. Now then, you Texas wild-cat, we understand each other. Whose is the next move—yours or mine?"

"Girl," said he, moving close to her, "don't say that you're the head o' this partridge business! Don't confess that! I got my duty along with the satisfaction o' this sentiment. I'd have to take you in—along with the men. I couldn't do that, girl. I'd almost rather miss bringin' in my men for the first time in my career."

His statement was a confession that he still loved her despite the disclosure; that he still wanted her. He wanted to say so in words. But he could not. The words refused to come.

For a furtive moment she looked up at him. On her face was the fierce wild mountain beauty. Her beautiful bosom rose and fell. Her lips trembled slightly. The traces of tears had not left her eyes.

But if the handsome young giant could not command the syllables to tell the thing on his soul, the iron lines of his face softened and told her instead.

When the girl suddenly realized that the ranger loved her, that he had come far across the nation to claim her, that the incident of her bitter experience appeared to make no difference with him—she wanted to be coquettish. She wanted to give way to the eternal feminine and the ways of the daughters of Eve. But she, in turn, could not! This much she told herself: he was the first and only man she had ever met that she could love, for he had made her drop her gun before the boys of the village, among whom she had held undisputed leadership.

"Have you got warrants for any o' the men in Lost Village?" she demanded.

"I have," said the ranger.

"Have you got—a warrant—for me?"

"I have not."

"Then," said the girl, "if I don't say anything about myself, there's no reason for you to believe worse o' me than you do?"

"There is not, girl."

The girl was confused. She hated the man, apparently, for the capture of her menfolk. Yet for that very thing she also admired him. She was angry at the display he had made of her weakness. Yet she could neither respect nor love him if he had not mastered her. She dared not yield

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to the embrace that the young weather-beaten Hercules of blood and iron was undergoing torture to give her. So she retreated from him. The whole situation had happened so suddenly, a god of a man had come into her life so dynamically and made the astounding proposition that he loved her—had been loving her for months over the countless miles between New England and Texas—that her calm head was whirling.

She unpinned the hat and jabbed the pins into the crown. She removed the coat. Then the masculine in her attitude suddenly gave way to the feminine in her heart. So quickly that the ranger was startled she had thrown herself down in a hard wooden chair. Her beautiful head was buried in her arms that were flung across the cheap pine table. And she wept.

The slanting sunshine, coming through the western window, played havoc in her head of golden hair. Ashmunn loped across. Hands strong and tough as rawhide gently took her shoulders. He lifted her in his strength. He drew her against him and turned her tear-wet face up to his.

"Look ahere, girl," said he. "It ain't no kid's love that's ailin' this prickly-pear roustabout. I'm a growed man, girl, and I come clear across this country to find you and make you mine. It's tough to find your folks in Dutch with the Government. It's tough to realize the girl that you love has to waste some o' her life in the pen. But there's things that's worse. One o' them is for a chap that's made the trip I have—to go back to where he come from without his woman. I want you, girl. I've wanted you for months. I'm on the level. I'm askin' you—I'd admire to have you come back to Texas—with me!"

The girl's heart was fluttering against his own. It was a stormy time for them both. Finally her hands stole up to his face. She smiled into his eyes through the tears like chips of diamonds which still swathed her deep gray depths.

Then as suddenly, seeming to realize what she was doing, she struggled free. She walked to the low-hung window. Standing there with her back to him, she watched the rims of the drowsing mountains out where the golden afternoon was waning.

She cried softly to herself:

"Am I dreamin' or am I not?" Then after a longer time: "Bein' proposed to—by a game-man!"

"I'm not a game-man," denied Ashmunn. "I'm only a chap that's been searchin' this country for the one girl and thanks to the sharp eyes o' Hal Sampson—has found her. Roundin' up this bird-stealin' crowd ain't nothin'. I can do it with one hand sewed in my sleeve. But roundin' up a woman you love—yet that ain't never heard o' you before—it's a handicap that sure is different."

"Look at these mountains," replied the girl after a time. "They're beautiful. I love 'em. But what's a woman's future way up here among 'em? What joy would a wife o' one o' these men find in life? What's the penalty she pays for bein' a woman—marryin' one o' these small-headed, long-necked, rum-swiggin' males that she'll have to play white-slave to—till she drops—and with no thankee but a curse."

The answer being self-evident, the woman went on:

"Do you know why I encouraged these folks to mix up with this partridge business? Because I was makin' money enough through them to go out—to get out—into the greater, bigger world and *be somebody*. When I'd got enough, I was goin' off somewhere, out West or down South, or maybe over the water—where nobody'd ever know o' them years I'd spent in the laundry o' a prison, where money might get me in with folks o' class, where I could marry a man that's a gentleman and have a home that's something better than a stable.

"Now then, if you want to blame me, go ahead. I was only tryin' to climb up, to be somebody, to better myself—this thing that's so commendable for everybody but some one who's been unfortunate enough to have done time for the State. The man that I shot—he was insultin' to me anyhow, when he tried to take me! And now—you've come! I've often dreamed of a man like you comin'. But I thought—I thought there was so much, so very very much for me to do, for me to overcome, for me to fight for and win, before I met a chap like you. It seems I'm dreamin'. I'm all upset. I don't know whether you're the man I want to marry or not——"

She seemed to pause here as though she wished some of her words might be recalled. After a time she concluded in softer tone:

"But you ain't afraid o' nothin'. And that's somethin'. I'll say this much: you

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got a chance; the best there is. It all depends on how you use it."

Every fiber in the Texan's big cosmos shrieked that he was winning—had won! But he said:

"Then I see I got to camp on this trail till I get the parties—and the party—I'm after. It ain't unusual. I guess I can do it."

"No, no, no!" she cried. "You mustn't stay 'round here. You just mustn't. There'll come a mornin' that you'll never see alive. Maybe I'm to blame, somewhat. I admit it. But the boys are all worked up over the interference or presence o' wardens. There's been gun-fights and some o' our tribe has been hit. Now that you made me drop my gun I may never be able to control 'em—especially if it's for a warden's protection. You must return. Come back with enough men to take 'em in a battle because that's the only way you're to take 'em at all. And while you're gone, I'll think. I'll try to get my balance and decide what's right to do. Go! Let me get back my old-time self-control."

The ranger laughed.

"Enough men for a battle!" said he. "Wouldn't I look nice returnin' to headquarters and askin' for enough men for a battle?"

He picked up his hat. He hitched his gun-belt higher.

"I'll be goin' back to the village now," said he. "I'm goin' to get them four I've come to get. When I'm back with 'em, seems you'll have time to decide. For the present——"

"You're not goin' into that hornets' nest!" she exclaimed horrified. "You're not descendin' there single-handed and attemptin' to take them fellers out alive!"

"I sure am! Have I your promise that you'll keep out?"

"Don't!" she cried. "You don't know what you're doin'."

A smile of quiet triumph played round the Texan's thin lips as he moved away from her.

"You wouldn't be so interested—you wouldn't say that—" said he, "unless you love me—a little bit. No, you wouldn't care a cuss what become o' me. You'd probably assist somethin' happenin'."

He left her.

She stared, white-faced, as he swung on his horse. She saw him ride to the crib to make certain his first two prisoners were still in durance. Then he cantered from the yard.

"If she keeps 'em tied up," he commented as he rode along, "I'll know that she's workin' with me—that she loves me—that I've won!"

IV

THE ranger rode back to the village.

He met a thin, scrawny, scarecrow of a woman on the road and stopped her.

"Madam," said he, "could I trouble you for a little information. Could you tell me whereabouts I might find the homes o' four men whose names I have on papers here."

The woman was frightened. But she dared not go on or refuse the knowledge desired. She waited until Wild-Cat had found his papers and repeated the names.

"They're over there—every man you jus' mentioned," said she, "—over there at Hank Dowell's place by the South Hill. Don't go over there!" she cried. "Not if you're the cow-boy feller this village is talkin' about! The men-folks have all got together to plan to get you—tonight."

"You mean they're holdin' some sort o' meetin'?"

"Yaas. The four you jus' mentioned and about a dozen others. Billy Hill's been roundin' them up with his buckboard durin' the past half-hour."

"They're all together!" mused the ranger. "Most accommodatin' chaps I ever heard of. Saves me a lot o' hawss-ridin'. Thanks!" said he curtly. He pricked the flank of the big black horse and it pounded away.

He dismounted before the general store.

"I want fifty feet o' the strongest rope you got in the place," he told the bony young female who had been left in charge.

The force of his personality overcame her feeble resistance. She had been instructed to sell him nothing. Wild-Cat secured the rope, paid its price and left, coiling it about his elbow as he walked.

He mounted the horse, a group of white-faced women and slovenly children watching. Dropping the rope over the horn, he rode straight for the prohibited house. Its roof was plainly visible over the rise of land that his informant had termed the South Hill.

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Ashmunn reached the house. Hearing voices in the rear he headed his horse for the barn. There was a shout of warning when the crowd learned who was with them. As suddenly it was hushed. An ominous, ugly silence greeted him as the Texan rode through the big door.

He sat still for a moment. Minutely he surveyed every face before him. Then slowly and distinctly he began:

"The laws o' this State, I'm told, absolve a game warden from responsibility if he shoots anybody that's resistin' arrest. You get my point?

"Four men o' this crowd are wanted by the authorities up to the capital. It's for bein' mixed up with this partridge-shippin' business——"

"It's Megg Bolton that's——"

"*Shut up!*" roared Ashmunn to the man who had brought the woman's name into the situation.

The ranger had difficulty controlling the fury which seized him. He waited several seconds for it to pass and his face was a dangerous thing. When he could trust his voice, the Texan said:

"I don't know nothin' about no woman. My warrants don't read that she's wanted. Lin Sawyer, Judd Barber, Thomas Tinnell and Luther Markett are the chaps I want. I've been sent to get them and no others. I sure am proud o' my reputation and ain't above addin' to it up here in New England. Now then, you four that I've named, stand out and declare yourselves."

There came a half-moment's terrified silence. Then a voice from the crowd volunteered:

"Oh, we're here all right. But if you reckon you're big enough man to take the four of us to once, come on and try."

"Just as I thought," returned Ashmunn. "You're a bunch o' cowards, all o' you. If you wasn't, you'd stand out so's I could see who you are."

"I reckon," came the answer, "you've called us bad names long enough. Come on, boys! Show this tin-horn cow-boy how 'fraid o' him we are. Stand out? Sure! We're sixteen to one. Reckon if we did up six the last time, we can do up one now."

There was a commotion in the deadly circle. Four men shoved forward. With murderous faces, white lips and clenched fists—or hands containing firearms or instruments picked up from the clutter of the stable—they waited the ranger's initiative.

Declared the Texan to the rest:

"I'm goin' to arrest these four for illegal interstate shipments o' game birds. I'm a-warnin' you now: the man that interferes will find himself spilled on the ground. And suspicious moves count as much as actual interference. Those who value life, get out. For some o' you, maybe it'll be your last chance."

The effect of the warning was to send the timid retreating toward the door. The psychological effect of these desertions was to smash the nerve of the more resolute remaining. One of the four men wanted, started to bolt.

"*Come back!*" thundered Wild-Cat.

The man had every chance for escape, providing he could make the bullet protection of the door-corner in time. But he could not disobey the ranger's terrible voice. Whimpering, he lurched against the side of a stall.

"You-all are comin' with me!" declared the Texan. One of the four said—

"If I go, I go dead!"

"Any o' you beside this chap goin' dead," said Wild-Cat, "or will you submit peaceably?"

They did not answer for they knew no reply. They only waited to see what the big man proposed to do.

Ashmunn lifted the rope round his horn and swung off.

"Turn around, you four," he ordered.

"What you aimin' to do?"

"Tie you up!"

"Not if I know it first! I won't be took!"

With the ugly butt of a wagon-jack, the speaker lunged for Ashmunn's head. Had it connected, it would have brained him. It did not connect. The Texan had expected an onslaught. He stepped to one side and his oaken fist stove in his assailant's face. At the instant, the remaining three bolted for liberty. Ashmunn laid out one with a swift contact of his heavy boot. He seized the remaining two and spun them with a crash against the stable wall. He caught them on the recoil. Two well-planted blows felled them like the double-swing of a pole-ax.

Four men had been knocked absolutely senseless in as many seconds. It was the neatest, swiftest bit of mastery the Texan had ever accomplished. It pleased him so that he hardly noted the explosion of a shotgun aimed at him from without, which

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harmlessly peppered one side of the structure. His six-gun banged three shots in mechanical retaliation from the bowels of the barn and the chicken-hearted remnant of the conspirators fled in terror.

With no traces of the extraordinary exertion showing on him, the Texan straightened out the senseless men. He secured his coil of rope and tied their hands together. As he had done to the first two men on the mountains, he allowed only enough space for them to walk single file. But being in a more ticklish situation with these later captives, he took a precaution he had often employed when he had several men to handle. The rope which shackled their hands behind them in measured nooses, led from each pair of wrists up to each man's throat. From thence it passed to the wrists of the man in front. And the man in front enjoyed the unpleasant experience of finding himself being led by a noose round his neck.

The other end of the rope was tied again to the saddle. When the work was complete, the Westerner proceeded to fortify himself with a cigaret.

He had smoked it half down when the first of the four regained consciousness. The man who had received the stomach blow with the boot was deathly sick. But his condition had no apparent effect on Ashmunn.

"Get up!" the latter ordered. "The four o' you—get up!"

Stumbling in the shortness of the rope, they finally made their feet. They were bleeding from their many bruises. One spat out blood and teeth where the Texan's blow had broken his mouth.

"What'll happen to my kids and folks," he wailed.

"You should o' thought o' that before breakin' the game laws," retorted Ashmunn. "March!"

"Where?"

"Accordin' to these here maps, the nearest place I can get you to a railroad for transportation to the capital is Petersburgh. That's eleven miles over the mountains."

"You can't make me march if I don't want."

"Then," retorted Ashmunn, swinging into the saddle, "you'll be dragged. With that rope 'round your neck, I don't envy you the experience."

There were exclamations of dismay and terror as they recognized how they were tied to the horse. If the horse should become unmanageable, it would mean strangulation.

The man who had been most obstreperous was now most meek.

"We'll walk!" he agreed. Then he pleaded: "But don't let your horse run. We might be dragged."

"Very good!" muttered Ashmunn. "Then advise them friends o' yours waitin' outside to pepper me with slugs and buckshot, just what'll happen if I should suddenly tumble from this critter dead—especially if some o' that shot should get under this critter's hide."

Out of the stable the strange quintet moved at last. Because of the short length of rope, the men shambled awkwardly. They called to their friends not to shoot. When their neighbors on the far side the road recognized what would happen if a gun was discharged, their gun-muzzles were lowered with frightful profanity.

The indomitable giant had accomplished a miracle. Not alone had he captured his men. He had created a situation where rescue was well-nigh impossible—at least a rescue in which their companions could not end except by being hung.

There was peppery cursing, promises of frightful retribution, wailings and even tears as the big Texan marched his prisoners forward. They were broken in spirit and body. They were helpless to prevent the huge black horse dragging them if for an instant the ranger should lose control of his mount. After a quarter-mile of useless vocal resistance, they gave it up. Submitting to the inevitable, they did the best plodding possible.

One demanded after a time:

"Where you headin' for? This ain't the road to Petersburgh."

"We're goin' to Megg's house first," explained the ranger. "I got two more prisoners up there to add to my string."

They gained the hill-top. In due time they turned into Megg's yard. Giving no indication of the emotion playing within him, the ranger drove his gang round the corner of the house and beheld the corn-crib.

The door was open and the crib was empty. His prisoners had been released!

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V

A SEARCH of the ramshackle house revealed no one. In a bedroom Ashmunn noted that the drawers of a bureau had been ransacked; others emptied. By all the signs the girl had packed her possessions and made her escape while escaping was good.

The ranger was furious when he returned to the yard.

"Come on, you fellows," he ordered. "Don't give me no nonsense. I ain't in a mood for fussin'. It's an all-night walk you-all are goin' to take. And I'm just hair-trigger mad and disappointed enough to send a bullet into the first signs o' anything suspicious and investigate afterwards. March!"

Obediently, they marched.

The afternoon was ending in a mellow twilight. The sun sank slowly and gradually painted the world in purple and pink. Finally in the velvet night came out one solitary trembling star.

A cast of human statuary on a huge black horse—four hollow-eyed men with hands roped behind them, marching doggedly at his side—wound up over the hill-tops and down into the hollows. They crossed the swamp bottoms. They entered and passed through wooded places where the hemlocks and pines met overhead—out into long stretches of roadway where the toggle of cattle bells sounded suddenly behind pasture bars slowly sinking into silhouette.

One, two, three miles were trudged in unbroken silence. The fireflies came out in the boglands. Crickets and other cheerful night insects sang among the dusty undergrowth beside the road. A film of ghostly dust hung in the still warm air behind them, raised by the scuffling feet and occasional wheelings of the horse.

Finally the eastern horizon took fire. The moon was coming up. It mounted above the vast wooded summits that locked the Petersburgh road and began to rise clear and cold above the mountains.

They had made the fourth mile when Ashmunn stopped. Since leaving the Lost Village, he had been watching all four directions. He was not yet out of the enemy's country and hardly expected to make such a coup without a semblance of some kind of battle.

"Wait!" he ordered.

The prisoners stopped, glad of the respite.

Distinctly the ranger's keen senses heard an approaching horse. Moreover, the horse was drawing a rig. He could hear the occasional clinking where the steel tires turned against the rocks and sand.

For the past several moments they had been approaching a cross-road. They were still hid from the sight of any one coming down, for the corner was wooded. But they were near enough to realize that the horse was being goaded to his utmost, racing down the hill.

Ashmunn said grimly:

"Pray Heaven this ain't none o' your gang comin' to your rescue. Because if anybody tries to take you fellers from me, there's them among you that's goin' to be presented with a long neck!"

A moment later the noisy vehicle had bounded round the turn ahead in the road. The horse came to his haunches with an abrupt stop as those in the buckboard saw the five ahead in the moonlight. Four men leaped out.

"Stop!" they commanded.

The ranger and his prisoners noted plainly the sawed-off rifles and shotguns.

"I reckon," said the voice of one that Ashmunn recognized as the sheriff of the early afternoon, "it'd be beneficial to the morals o' this community if you let them prominent citizens go."

Ashmunn was no coward. On the other hand, with his men safely thus far, he was taking no chances. He swung off his horse, down among his prisoners, still clutching the bridle tightly. With his free hand he drew his gun. With a bead on the spokesman across the shoulders of his protecting prisoners, he said:

"Turn that buggy 'round. Drive it ahead o' me. If you don't, I'm a-goin' to fire. Shoot back if you want. Your friends are in front o' me and it's them you'll hit—to say nothin' o' what the horse will do if once he gets to buckin'. Come on! You got two minutes to obey or I'll open this fight myself!"

There was profane consultation. Earnestly and loudly the shackled men called for the others to go back.

"One minute gone!" sang out Ashmunn.

The four on ahead appeared to have reached a decision. They loaded pell-mell into the buckboard. They whirled it about, nearly ditched it, belabored the horse and disappeared on ahead.

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"So it's to be an ambush?" commented the ranger. "Now then, I want information and I want it straight. If I don't get it straight, it's to be you four who are goin' to suffer for it's you four that must travel afoot: Where does this road to our right lead and is there a chance to detour the distance to the station?"

It appeared there was. If the road to the right, down which the rescue party had just come, was chosen, there was another road south two miles up the hill which entered Petersburgh by another route.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, that the solicitations o' your thoughtful friends compel me to walk you several miles out o' your way. But I'm takin' no chances o' bein' potted from the bushes on ahead. Not that I care a dum for your precious necks. But I ain't quite ready yet for folks to walk past me and say: 'Don't he look natural?'"

He drove them up the road to the right. The moonlight became whiter. For miles the ranger could see the details of the beautiful mountain country.

Keeping a sharp look-out to the left and behind, the ranger had traversed half the hill when objects in a meadow on his left, caused him to pause.

The meadow was rank with tall grass. The objects far out in the open might be blasted stumps. Only the ranger fancied he saw them in different locations than he had noted them a moment previously. If they were the crouching figures of men, he realized they had grown wise, discovered his dodge and were cutting across the corner meadow to intercept him in ambush on the hill-top. Somehow, if taken unaware, they apparently hoped to bowl him from his saddle and get the horse's bridle before an accident happened to their townsmen.

Ashmunn turned in his saddle and glanced back the way they had come. He was deciding on the best vantage ground for a fight. His face hardened when back in the moonlight he distinctly saw three men moving behind him up the road. They were closing in on him also from the rear. There were seven to the rescue party instead of four.

"Surrounded!" muttered the Texan to himself. He saw as he stopped and watched that the three in the rear took to the bushes that fringed a stone wall on his left. Over on that side was another open field of uncut hay. "Waal, if their bowels is just achin' for battle, battle we'll hand 'em a-plenty." He wheeled his horse.

"We're goin' into this hayfield!" he announced. One prisoner cried aghast:

"And ain't you agoin' to tie the horse?"

"I am not!"

"But if there's shootin' he may run. Then what's to become of us?"

"That's the least o' my worries. Mount over this stone wall and mount in a hurry."

"It's murder!" the man replied hoarsely.

"Don't blame me. Blame them kind and lovin' friends o' yourn who are so cussedly bound to mess up matters."

Once in the field, Ashmunn turned to scan his rear. The three men behind had disappeared. They had apparently seen his move and likewise taken to the grass.

"Goin' to worm their way through the hay so I can't see to pot 'em," commented Wild-Cat. "Well, it denotes a reasonable amount o' brains."

"You better give in," sobbed one of the men, his voice breaking like a woman's. "It's seven to one. You're as good as captured!"

"That's news to me," returned the ranger. "Now you fellers shut up your lip. I've somethin' else to take up my attention besides mutual conversation."

One of the four tried diplomacy.

"If you'll let me go," said he, "I'll make them boys see how you've got the drop on them. I can persuade 'em to go back and let us alone."

"I don't give a rap about persuadin' 'em!" the Texan swore. "It's plain the only persuasion they can understand is made o' lead."

Ashmunn saw now that his conjecture was correct. One by one moving objects mounted the stone wall far up ahead and keeping their crouching position, they dived into the grass.

"Go back, boys! Go back!" a second began to shout. "Don't try to take us. We're hitched to the horse and if you scare him, we're hung!"

A voice from far up ahead replied:

"We're wise, fellers. We know he's threatenin' you to make you say that. Keep your dander up, boys. The horse won't drag you far with a bullet in his head!"

There was a sudden flash and the bang of a rifle. But the bullet must have passed off harmlessly in the air. It failed to reach its mark. The noise scared the horse,

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however. He began to wheel and his four prisoners went nearly insane in despair. But the horsemanship of the ranger prevented a tragedy.

This was the declaration that Ashmunn had dreaded. They were trying for his horse in the moonlight. Afterward they could surround him and capture him as they desired. That they would murder him the ranger had not the least doubt.

If the ranger had been mounted on his trained cayuse of the southwestern deserts, the animal would lie down and remain quiet in such a situation. But the northern horse was momentarily becoming more frightened and harder to rule.

The only chance for the horse's life—and possibly his own—was to throw the animal and hide him likewise by the tall grass.

"If I only had a rope to hobble him!" he cried to himself.

Then an idea occurred to him.

Handcuffs!

Bulging his hip pockets, the ranger had four pairs. He had brought them for use on his men after he had them on the train. He had heard of the trick being done. He would try it now. If only they were large enough in their claws to encircle the animal's forelegs.

The ranger slid from the saddle. Clutching the bridle, he reached for the implements. He awaited his chance. He got one set of jaws around one foreleg. They snapped shut cruelly tight. But they held.

Gently and caressingly—while the sinister figures up forward moved nearer and nearer in the grass—the Texan coaxed over the alarmed animal's other foot so the connecting pair of chains would reach.

The time was short. As the seconds ticked by and the horse acted stubbornly, the ranger expected the explosion of a gun from somewhere before his face that would end his chances of escape permanently. But he saw the chance for a dexterous twist before it happened.

The horse leaped. The ranger emitted a grunt of satisfaction when he saw that the two chains would hold. Two bounds the horse gave to free himself. Then with a crippled lunge, down he came with a dull crash on his left shoulder.

With a spring, the ranger was on his head. Two hundred pounds of bone and sinew was weighed on the fighting animal's skull. For a moment it was the strength and skill of the man against the brute strength of the horse. And the horse lost.

Mistaking the trick for an effective placing of the last bullet, the shout sounded ahead:

"We've got the horse, boys! Come on! The rest is easy!"

"Is it?" muttered Ashmunn. "More news to me!"

The plunging horse, beneath the Texan's soothing care, grew somewhat quieter. The ranger still stayed on his head, keeping an eagle eye on the grass ahead. His gun was poised and ready. Cartridges a-plenty he had in his belt. But he would have a poor chance to reload, lying as he was across the horse's head. He had six shots. There were seven men. If he made every shot count, he might frighten off the seventh or grapple with him. At any rate, he must figure on every shot counting and none could be wasted.

To his horror-silenced prisoners across from the prostrate animal's body, he said:

"Don't you-all disremember I'm in a tight place and knows it perfectly. You chaps lie down and keep motionless. I don't stand for no moves that's suspicious. I'm aimin' not to do any more murder here tonight than is necessary. Wanton killin' never appealed to me. But I can't afford to take chances. I'm goin' to get the first thing that makes a move on me from any direction—includin' yourselves."

The shackled horse plunged once or twice in those moments of agony while the Westerner waited. He was doing the work of a half-dozen men. He began to doubt himself if he was going to get away with the task. But that did not mean he expected ever to surrender. Momentarily he expected the explosion of a gun and the needle-stab of searing pain that would announce his own wrecked body.

A hat appeared above the tall grass ahead in the moonlight. But the Texan did not waste his shot.

"I was wise to all them tricks when I was a kid," he sang out. "I don't waste no lead pellets on a sky-piece hoisted on a gun-barrel. I know you-all wouldn't risk your lives standin' as plain in the moonlight as that. Put it on, feller; you might catch cold."

There were no traces of the three men in his rear. But they had a much longer distance to traverse to reach him.

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"Waal," called the Texan, "I'm waitin'! Why don't you-all come on?"

In reply to the taunt, a shot banged wildly ahead. The horse plunged wildly. Ashmunn held him firmly down.

The moonlit country and the surrounding mountains were becoming velvety and wonderful beneath the gorgeous sky. A mosquito zeeped against the ranger's ear. A cricket called to him a foot away in the dew-wet grass.

One, two, three minutes crept away.

The situation seemed dead-locked. Apparently they did not wish to run the risk of running across their enemy in the hay. Neither were they willing to take the initiative and run the risk of wrapping themselves about a hot bullet while getting their bearings.

"Waal you dummed cowards—come on and fight!" cried the exasperated ranger.

No answer!

Instead—soft as a breath of the night-wind in the grass at his right, came something that sounded like a whisper. It said:

"You Texas wild-cat! Are you there, big feller?"

The ranger could see nothing. Fearing a trick, he squirmed till his gun was pointed toward the sound.

"Sh! Don't shoot! It's me—Megg!"

The Texan wouldn't believe it.

"How do I know it? I ain't exactly in no mood for pleasantries."

"The photograph had Old Man o' the Mountains in the background. You remember that?"

Then the ranger knew the girl was a short distance from him in the grass. It was a clever proof that she really was the speaker.

The ranger turned as cold as ice. Then his brain became giddy as the surprise drove the blood to his head.

The girl! Out here on this field of bullets with him now!

Suddenly the grass a few feet on the right, parted. For an instant the woman came to his side. She reached over and wrapped a warm hand about his icy one.

"Leave 'em to me!" said she. "Between the two o' us we'll get 'em all to Petersburgh or we'll swing 'em up on rifle stocks."

"What you aimin' to do, girl?"

"Give 'em a little distress in the rear!"

She rolled over through the tall grass.

She was gone!

VI

THE RANGER lay across his horse's head with his thoughts in confusion.

Then the girl had not betrayed her trust. Or could it be that she was tricking him and executing some maneuver for the attacking party? No, there had been the gentle, firm pressure on his hand.

But when she had left him and the minutes ticked away in the moonlit silence, the Texan began to grow nervous. The dew of the grass struck through to his marrow. Like a soldier who shivers in the trenches wishing devoutly for the charge to take the place of inactivity, he could only lie and wait.

Then as abruptly, the girl put an end to the tension. He heard her tones ahead in the night-light—the sweetest music that ever had greeted his ear:

"Drop them guns, you scum! Put up your mitts—the four o' you. I told you distinctly there was to be no gun-play on this feller. You disobeyed. Now I've gone over to him! I'm fightin' 'longside him. Get up!"

Ashmunn heard a word that sounded like "traitor."

"Traitor, is it?" said she. "Traitor to who? To you? What do I care whether or not I'm a traitor to such as you—who'd have shot me in the back a dozen times when I refused to marry each o' you—if you'd had the nerve. Traitor because I'm white enough to stand by one lone man battling against four. Traitor! Well, you heard what the traitor just ordered. Put up them hands or I'll blow you to hell!"

"Tell the cow-boy not to shoot. If we rise up, he'll pot us."

"He won't if I say so. But it'd serve you right if he did. Get up! Leave them guns on the ground!"

"I won't get up!"

The words were hardly uttered before a terrible gun-shot followed. The ranger felt a sudden sickness seize him. It was murder!

"Don't kill 'em, Megg!" he shouted. "They're worth twice as much if we take 'em in alive."

The ranger sprang up, releasing the horse.

He saw the girl standing a hundred feet away in the moonlight. She was knee-deep in the grass.

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"I ain't killed 'em—yet," she assured him. "I just put a lead pill through Tug's sky-piece to help out his slow understandin' that I want him to hustle!"

The four frustrated men of the rescue party stumbled to their feet. They had relinquished their guns. Scalawag Megg had them covered with two deadly revolvers and they knew her too well of old to tempt too far on her patience.

"Tie 'em up, cow-boy," she ordered. "If you want more rope there's a coil o' it round my left shoulder under the coat."

"What's the use," cried the man that Ashmunn recognized as the constable. "Megg's gone back on us! The game's up!"

The ranger procured the rope from the clever place where the girl had carried it. They drove their men to where the released horse was snipping off the top of the grass, raising his head occasionally to snort at the night.

"Your horse—wasn't shot?" asked the girl.

Ashmunn told of his ruse and when the additional four men had been secured, the two of them got off the stout and sturdy handcuffs together.

"I've left a horse tied down the road by the cross-cut corner," said Megg. "He ain't much on speed but he can carry a load."

While the girl held the two revolvers covering them dangerously, the ranger kicked and punched and drove his cursing crowd together, mounting his horse and hitching both to the saddle horn.

"I'll walk behind," said the girl. "They might need metallic persuasion."

The ranger said:

"It's a risk we're runnin', yet, girl. There's three more men crawlin' round this hay-field somewhere. I saw them turn in when I took to this lot."

"It was me you saw—and two others," confessed the girl.

"Two others? Who? Where are they?"

"My step-dad and step-brother Henry. I've tied 'em up to the big cherry tree further down the lot at the wall."

"Tied 'em up! What were you doin' with 'em?"

"Takin' 'em to the capital myself. I love 'em about as much as a good Christian loves Judas Iscariot. Anybody in Lost Village would have told you that."

"Takin' 'em to the capital? What for?"

"I knew you wasn't goin' to get out o' the Lost Village without needin' help. You was too brave and courageous to know the risk you was runnin'. I knew old Sampson might not believe my story. I was takin' in my own men-folks as proof o' my sincerity."

"But how—?" the ranger began.

"I was hid in the brush with 'em, down by the turn. I was waitin' for midnight. I didn't want to meet nobody on the road to Petersburgh. I was back in the woods and heard the talk when you and these four men met at the corner. When you turned up here I saw you was goin' to need help. So I just come on to give you a hand."

For the first time the ranger felt in his life that sense of comradeship that comes to a man when the sturdy partner at his right hand is the woman that he loves—who loves him in return—who is working head and heart and hand in his interest.

"Girl," he said, and his voice was thick, "I——"

"Go on!" she ordered. "Leave the soft stuff till later. We've got eight dangerous men here to handle and two more down the lot. They may get us yet. I know their breed."

VII

AGAIN Commissioner Sampson turned in annoyance at an interruption. Again it was his clerk who offended. This time his secretary's eyes were popping. He had difficulty making language get clear of his face.

"The ranger—the Texan—" he sputtered.

"Well," returned Sampson, "what about him? Has he fallen off his horse—broke his fool head or something?"

"He's just come in from the Berlin Mountains. And he's brought in ten men. Lord! He brought 'em in tied together in bunches! And most of them resemble folks you see in your sleep after a supper of cheese and mince-pie."

"He's outside," went on the clerk, giving his chief no time for exclamation. "And who do you suppose he's got with him? It's a woman—mostly in man's togs exceptin' her short skirt. And Lord!—she's a pippin from Pippinville!"

"But in three days—ten men and the woman—it's preposterous!—why, it's a miracle!"

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Megg and the ranger were ushered in. The disappointed secretary was ordered out.

"Your men are down-stairs in the county jail," said the ranger simply. "And I've got—my woman! This here's Megg Bolton. Megg, this important-lookin' hunk o' bull beef is Hal Sampson I told you about." There was a deep twinkle in the ranger's eye. "The only redeemin' feature about him is that he come originally from the State o' the prickly pear." Ashmunn turned to the game-man. "If there's nothin' else to do, Hal Sampson, I'll be goin' home!"

The ranger waited, patiently, self-controlled.

When in due process of time, Commissioner Sampson had sufficiently recovered to convey his thoughts intelligently by the usual method of human intercourse, he demanded—

"Tell me, Ashmunn—for Heaven's sake, how did you do it?"

"It ain't usual," responded the Texan with finality, "for us boys to tell how we do things. What is the high-browed word that fits it?—unethical—that's the monicker. We just do 'em. We're expected to do 'em. Ours is one job in the world where no kind o' excuses go."

"I'll tell you how he did it," flashed the girl from Lost Village. She gave a proud glance at the handsome young giant beside her. "He did it by bein' six-feet-two o' solid man! He came up into the hills all alone. Every minute his life was in danger. Them boys was ready to pop at him from behind somethin' quick as they'd et pie! But he never batted an eye nor turned a hair. He knocked down and dragged out the men he wanted and the rest run like the scum that they were.

"He was surrounded in a field in the night. He was for fightin' it to a finish. He did it because there warn't no fear in him. And the measure o' a man's fear—or lack o' it—*is his measure o' a man!* I'm proud o' him! I don't care who knows it. For the last ten years I've been waitin' for a man like him. And he's arrived. From the minute he made me drop my gun, I loved him. I'll go all over the world with him. I'll live with him in a dug-out in the mountains, on the deserts or by the sea—just to be near him—and help him—and love him. And"—she blushed to the beautiful hair—"we're leavin' for Texas as soon as you let us."

The ranger, in his blushes, was a close second to his woman. In return, he paid the girl the highest compliment a man can pay a woman. He said:

"The woman—she helped me. Half the credit goes to her!"

Commissioner Sampson seemed to arouse from a stupor.

"Ashmunn," said he. "You can't go back just yet. Some one's got to stay and appear against those other six men."

Wild-Cat said:

"Hal Sampson, at twelve o'clock this high noon at the Congregational parsonage on High Street, I'm to commit matrimony. After that, I don't much care what happens to me."

The ranger waited. The commissioner stared at the two wordlessly.

"There was a little matter o' spondulicks, Hal Sampson," said Ashmunn. "I hope you ain't disremembered it——"

"No, no, no! Certainly not!" he cried. "A thousand dollars, I said. But for three days' work—ten men and the girl—and he brought 'em in tied in bunches——!"

The commissioner left the room. He was gone a long time. He did not doubt the Texan's word, but he wanted a look with his own eyes.

He beheld and he returned.

When he re-entered the office he had in his hands twenty fifty-dollar bills.

An hour later, alone in his office, he looked at the stub of his check-book where he had torn out his personal check and cashed it in order to give the ranger the thousand dollars.

"I'll get a voucher Thursday for three days' work for a deputy warden at two-fifty a day to reimburse me," he said. "That'll leave me nine-hundred and ninety-two dollars and fifty cents in the hole. But I don't grudge a cent of the money. Matrimony without cash is like a cake without sugar."

Sampson closed the check-book and dropped it in the middle drawer of his desk.

"Fool young Westerner!" he concluded. "Anyhow, that nine-ninety-two-fifty pays a little on account for what his dead father did for me in the matter of the blank bullets in MacIntosh's gun down in the prickly pear bottoms of Texas twenty-five years ago!"

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AT THIS writing, June first, a good many of our writers have already given their services to the country. In some cases I have only report, but among those of whom I know definitely are:

Gordon McCreagh, aviation service, Naval Reserve; Patrick and Terence Casey, Naval Reserve; Harold A. Lamb, 7th N. G. N. Y.; Farnham Bishop and Douglas Watson, Officers' Training-Camp; Charles Brown, Jr., hospital service in France; H. M. Gwynn, Officers' Reserve Corps; E. E. Harriman, David L. MacKaye, home guard; George W. Sutton, Jr., 1st N. Y. Motor Battery; Donald Francis McGrew, 1st Maine; Dr. J. U. Giesy, Frederick Simpich, George Warburton Lewis, Major Frederick S. Macy and Captain George B. Rodney were, of course, already in Government service, and W. Townend, Major W. Robert Foran, William Hope Hodgson, Edgar Wallace, Albert Kinross and Theodore Goodridge Roberts have been serving England since close to the beginning of the war. Robert J. Pearsall, Roy P. Churchill, Captain A. E. Dingle, Frederick William Wallace and others have offered their services but slight defects of eyesight, a few years in age or some lack in meeting the exceedingly exacting details of physical requirements have barred them out. Captain Dingle, therefore, is doing an even more useful work by conducting a school of navigation. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur's fate, at last hearing, was hanging on the eyesight test. Talbot Mundy (recently become an American citizen) and Hugh Pendexter, not being eligible for service at the front, are, like others of our writers, working hard in recruiting work and agricultural organization.

THERE are, of course, still others of our writers who have responded to the country's call, but lacking definite information, I'm not including them in the present list.

As to the rest of you there's no use trying to make a list, for there are too many. Just yesterday one of you came into the office, mad as a hornet because the exacting physical requirements barred him everywhere in spite of his splendid experience and qualifications in other respects. And he had come clear from South America to offer himself. His consolation is his belief that the French won't be so particular.

To all these we of the Camp-Fire give our salutes and Godspeeds. May they all come back to us.

FROM Dr. Louis C. Mullikin comes the following, bringing us more news of the old-timers of the Western frontier inquired about by Frank H. Huston:

The enclosed will dispose of two named by Frank H. Huston. The civilian Scout with Crook (at one time) was Albers who was last heard of about five years ago in Central America.

Deaf Smith, I believe, died a natural death in Central Texas. Don't know much about him but probably the author of this letter (enclosed) could secure you definite information, not only of Smith but others of "The Golden Days."—LOUIS C. MULLIKIN.

The letter Dr. Mullikin refers to was written to him by Jno. R. Lunsford, managing editor of the *American* of Austin, Texas, and by Mr. Lunsford's courtesy is passed on to you:

At the time of his death, March 9, 1884, King Fisher was sheriff of Uvalde County. He had come to Austin a day or two prior to his death to settle his accounts with the comptroller, and, with his friend Ben Thompson, who was then city marshal of Austin, went to San Antonio on the evening of March 9, 1884.

ABOUT midnight Thompson started a fight in Jack Harris's vaudeville theater on Main Plaza, in which he and King Fisher were killed. The fight was the sequel to the killing of Jack Harris by

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Ben Thompson more than a year before; and when Thompson and his companion appeared in the theater, it was a foregone conclusion that there would be a tragedy. King Fisher never succeeded in drawing his gun. Several bullets went through his head and body, and also through Ben Thompson, who was the instigator of the row.

So far as is known, King Fisher had no provocation to take a hand in the fight, beyond the fact of his friendship for Ben Thompson and that they had been associated for some years in Mexico and had become close friends.

IT IS commonly understood that King Fisher had killed a number of Mexicans, and it is known of record that, as a peace officer, he was instrumental in the removal of a number of the worst desperados in west Texas. He was a man of splendid physique, vigorous, alert, and a dead shot; but in the tragedy which cost him his life he had no chance, because of the fact that the appearance of Thompson meant a killing the minute he entered the house whose proprietor and owner he had killed the year before.

I hope these facts will meet your requirements; and they are given from personal information, as I happened to have been the unfortunate reporter to handle that tragedy a great many years ago. —JNO. R. LUNSFORD.

HERE is bad news from one of us at the front, dated April twelfth, written in England—Thomas Melville Ross. Yet luckily not the worst news. Perhaps by the time you read this I shall have seen him and given him your welcome and sympathy as well as my own:

Sorry that I failed to keep in touch with you. You'll understand why, when I tell you that I have been up against it again—got it good and strong. So much so that I am now unfit for further service. Shall be soon returning to little old U. S. A. My regret is keen, now that Old Glory is about to break into the game. Kismet. I'll look in, if I may, on my return. In the meantime please don't answer this until you hear of my new location.—T. M. ROSS.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, Edwin L. Sabin, having joined us with a story in our magazine for the first time, rises and introduces himself. We give him welcome and our friendship.

What constitutes an adventurer? You may board a trolley-car in a business thoroughfare, and every strap and every seat will be occupied by the adventurer. Finance, love, health—life itself and each tomorrow, these are adventures. The clerk behind the counter, the tailor who cuts the cloth, the sweeper of the street, are still soldiers of fortune. We adventure into the world, we adventure through it, and we adventure out of it. The ranks of adventure are always full.

AS FOR me, what have I done, of moment? I look back, from middle life. I see boyhood's Mississippi flanked by Illinois bayous and Iowa hills. The Winter wagon-road across, the leagues upon leagues inviting the steel-shod explorer; in Spring the piling floes, the tawny freshet from the north, the myriads of honking geese; in Summer the picturesque river traffic, the bared bars, the rafts and the dive into the mighty current, the rhythmic lunge to the heavy oar, the blistered hands, the scalded arms, the Treasure Islands; inland, pond, creek, sand-dune, marsh, the apparently illimitable timber. And ever the heart of youth, where gun, rod, boat, camp and imagination were youth's rightful heritage. Breed's Hill, Bunker Hill, Comanche Bluffs; Dead Man's Slough, Sunfish Slough; Beaver Island, Goose Lake, Dark Hole—these are names to conjure with. They thrill me now.

COLLEGE—where the banner of romance beckons never so gallantly. Some rapid, hard years of daily newspaper work by day and by night: that great educator in man's motives, that constant manhunt where one's brain must be quicker on the draw than the other fellow's. Three months at sea, in a ninety-foot schooner among the West Indies: Havana before the war, a forbidden Morro, the filibuster cove of Bahia Honda where the oysters hang to the mangrove roots and the mosquitoes hide the sights on the gun-barrel; the whine of the squall in the rigging, the roll of the white surf on whiter sand, the tufted coco-palms sentinel over unnamed, even uncharted coral keys; the pictographs by century-back buccaneers at the ancient well on Dead Man's; the triangular flag of the hammerhead shark, cruising like a submarine; the work of the Bahama wreckers.

THEN, following the call of the blood, the trek to the West—to Colorado. I smell the damp sage and the cedar fire when in early morning I throw off the bed-sheet, to the round-up cook's shrill yap, and we rise, all of us, like mummies resurrected. I ease in the saddle, hot from hours of riding, riding, riding, and the wild-onion reek of the cows' dusty nostrils drifts back as we plod behind, to turn in our gather and squat around the Dutch ovens. I see the little lambs of the open sheep-range play follow-my-leader amidst the golden twilight on the mystic sage, before, reluctant, they seek their complaining mammies in the bedding-ground. Alone, I make my own trail, up, up, through the pines, through the spruces, through the sprawled cedars, to the ultimate bald-top where in the snow and the gravel the ptarmigans chatter and peck. I witness the sunrise on the plains, and worship the sunset on the desert. I hear the chant, all night, of the Pueblos in their council chambers; and try to read the sign-language of my wrinkled host.

BUT of adventure—sheer adventure? Little, mayhap. I never have faced a real enemy—except as Nature had her passing moods. I never have been forced to manhandle anybody, and never have been manhandled since my short-pants days. I never have fired a hostile shot, save that some animals have I killed, for which I am sorry. I have faced death—we all have: drowning, gunshot, the knife; and I am glad, because I was not very much afraid. I have a fancy for such regions as I may find beyond the tin-can precincts, but I scarcely have pioneered. However, many Western pioneers have been my friends and teachers, and from them have I learned much. If the Sioux and the Cheyenne rode again, it seems to me that I would know how to

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act. I love a gun, a rod, a horse, a dog, and the vast reaches. I love old narratives. Somehow, I miss the buffalo, and the beaver trail.

BUT I have merely sat at the feet of Adventure. It is mine to tell other persons' stories, to live other persons' deeds. Robert Louis Stevenson could do no more, although he could do it better. Ah, there was an adventurer!

So I would enter into the circle of the Camp Fire-light as comes the sudden wayfarer, unheralded, unchallenged, from the surrounding darkness; sits, eats, listens, says little, beds down; and in the morning goes his appointed path, leaving no name, and presently forgotten in the new day's duties. But in heart he may have been a great adventurer, notwithstanding.—EDWIN L. SABIN.

ANOTHER letter from a comrade at the front, our Australian friend, Harry C. Winter, headed "In the Mud-Puddle, France," and dated April eighteenth. Now that we *have* come into the war, he's had to change one of his opinions:

Don't think me lax at not writing oftener, but, truth to tell, one rarely gets the opportunity these strenuous times. Then again the mail service across the pond is rather precarious just at present and the chances of you getting letters are rather vague.

I MUST thank you very much for making my excuses to the lots of correspondents who wrote me and whom I found it impossible to answer individually. The censor's patience, as you can imagine, is rather limited and one gets the order of the boot if guilty of writing too much junk.

I have been transferred from the mounted branch to infantry, a fine old regiment with a grand record. Some of your British readers will know it, the Northumberland Fusileers, better known as the Fighting Fifth.

IT SEEMS ages since I wrote you from Peru, and I've certainly been through something since then. We are out of the trenches for a rest and a much needed one, too.

You folks across the water do not realize the magnitude of the job; it's *some* job. I can assure you that we will win, however, we are optimistic enough to believe. How long it will take "quien sabe?" Expected you folks would be in it ere this, but doubtless President Wilson is acting for the best. With the queer mixture of races he has to deal with, I can imagine the hell it would start, did he take the plunge.

Fritz is dying hard. He's a scrapper, but I think his spirit is gradually being broken. In the line and out he is murdered by an iron discipline that eats into his soul. They are tickled to death to be taken away prisoners and get away from it all.

OUR discipline is strict, but of the kind any man can take kindly to, and our officers *lead*. They don't chase the troops up from the rear with a gun behind them as Fritz's people do. How he can stand the awful battering he gets from our artillery (and a modern bombardment is something too thick for mere words) I don't know; it's simply hellish. But I must not go on in this strain. The war is strictly labor. Sufficient we're still smiling and will see the joke through.

Now chase me over a few magazines, will you please, and remember me kindly to all inquiring friends, and with best wishes to yourself and staff—HARRY C. WINTER.

Unfortunately I have to add a later communication from Mr. Winter, a post-card postmarked May 4 at Hampstead, England, and May 25 at New York. He must have been wounded shortly after writing the letter above. At least it's good that he fared no worse than he did, and here's to his quick recovery.

Managed to get knocked out with shrapnel through the knee-cap. I expect it will keep me down for a while. However, am still as optimistic as ever. The scrap now is the last word in scraps. Glad to note Uncle Sam has taken a hand. Fritz will get what's coming to him now and he needs it badly. My address is now 48541, H. C. Winter, 9th Battalion, Northumberland Fusileers, 21 Ward, New 2d (?) Military Hospital, Hampstead, London, England.—HARRY C. WINTER.

AS TO Theodore S. Solomons' story in this issue, he writes us:

The one fact basis of the story is the incident of a certain—— —— who, when "soused," once walked down the main street of —— —, Alaska, with a 30-30 Winchester across his arm, which "seemed to discharge itself occasionally" . . . Later he became town marshal and was the best peace-officer we ever had.

SOME of you will remember a letter printed in February "Camp-Fire" from a sea captain who claimed to know the location of treasure on Cocos Island. Today a letter reached me, from one who had joined the captain in an expedition for the treasure, stating that nothing had come of the attempt—that it got no farther than Panama.

I do not know the facts in the case. When the captain's letter was published I made no comment on it except that it was interesting and I took care to open the little article as follows: "Cocos Island—the name is almost synonymous with buried treasure and with expeditions that have failed to get anything for their pains."

I went even further and, though the captain had given me his name and address, I carefully did not publish either one. Not only did I in no way vouch for him or his expedition, but, knowing nothing of the particular case beyond the letter itself, I went out of my way to sound a note of warning against Cocos Island expeditions in

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general. There have been many, some of them honest and some not, but none of them has brought back treasure.

IN THE face of all this quite a few letters came to us with the request that I give the name and address of the captain or forward the letters to him. Knowing nothing against the captain, just as I knew nothing in his favor, I complied with these requests, for I had no right to refuse. I had no ground whatever for suggesting that this particular man and expedition were anything but O. K., and I had already sounded the general warning. The general warning had been desregarded and the inquirers had taken matters into their own hands.

This morning's letter says the captain stated "that *Adventure* had also offered to finance the proposition." Neither *Adventure* or any one connected with it ever did anything of the kind, or had any connection with it whatsoever other than stated here. I had several letters from the captain (I have never met him, though Mr. Wade has) and in one of them he asked whether I couldn't put him in touch with some adventurers with money to put into his scheme. I replied that I wished I could but couldn't. I also wished him, it and them good luck. I figured quite a lot of good luck might come in handy. That is as near "financing" the expedition as this magazine got.

I GO into detail in this matter because there have been two or three like it in the past and because there will probably be more in the future. I want to say emphatically that neither *Adventure* nor any one connected with it has ever backed, vouched for or financed any treasure expedition at at any time. There is little chance that we ever will. And if we ever do we will certainly come out openly and state the fact clearly and unmistakably.

In one case, in response to inquiries, I stated that I personally believed in the personal integrity of the organizer, for I had dealt with him for years and found him honest. I still believe him so. As editor of the magazine I had no connection with his expedition and did not vouch for it. As the man's personal friend I helped him on one occasion revise the wording of some of his publicity matter. In return for this small favor he sent me a small stock certificate, though there had been no thought of compensation on my part. The stock, of course, is valueless. Out of compliment to the magazine, I think, the expedition was given its name. In addition to this, he had been given the privilege of our "Wanted" column, a privilege equally open to all of you at that time.

Aside from one or two even more minor matters which have already been stated at Camp-Fire, the above covers all our connections with expeditions.

IN GENERAL, lest any of our newer readers get a wrong idea, let me say this: Our "Camp-Fire" is as honest as I can make it. I try to choose for it those letters that will be most interesting to you. These letters are passed on to you and you are left to form your own opinions of them. That part of it is your own business, not mine. All I vouch for is that I received those letters from the people and places named. If I have anything else to say, I say it; if I say nothing, it means that I have nothing to say. If I say I vouch for anything, I do vouch for it; if I don't say I vouch for it, I don't vouch for it.

Of course I don't let anything and everything go into "Camp-Fire." The main point is to give you things that will be interesting, but the bulk of the things printed I personally believe to be true and unless I *know* an item is not true it is not barred out.

In a word, we come to our Camp-Fire to hear things we like to listen to, and the years have proved that there is not only good listening but valuable information to be obtained. What we listen to we must weigh each for himself and act accordingly. There is little chaff and much wheat, but each of us must do his own sifting. And meanwhile we enjoy ourselves, find new friends and new interests and get better acquainted all around.

I HOPE each one of you will read at least once all of "*Adventure's* Free Services to Readers" which now always runs right after "Camp-Fire." It will save trouble and correspondence. Also, new readers will find there some things that will be of use to them.

Letters still come in for the old "Wanted" and "Letter Friends" departments. Both had to be abolished because, after several years of useful service, two or three people abused them and thereby robbed the rest of you of their use.

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For All Interested in Military or Naval Affairs

WE GIVE you below a list of those books which we believe will prove of special value and aid both to enlisted men and officers and to those who will make up our great army this Fall.

Infantry

Fundamentals of Military Service, by Captain Lincoln C. Andrews, U. S. Cavalry. Prepared under supervision of Major-General Leonard Wood. Particularly valuable to the citizen soldier. A text-book on the meanings and requirements of military service. Thorough, yet so lucid that any one can understand it. 1916—J. B. Lippincott Co. Philadelphia, Pa. $1.50 net. 428 pages.

Self-Helps for the Citizen Soldier, by Captain James A. Moss and Captain Merch B. Stewart. A non-technical book on military rudiments written for the benefit of the civilian almost entirely ignorant of military matters. 1915—George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wis. $1.25.

Militia Field Manual, by Lieutenants George R. Guild nd Frederick C. Test. The daily field duties of every man in a militia organization. 1915—George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wis. $1.00 postpaid. Pocket edltion.

The Plattsburg Manual, by Captain O. O. Ellis and E. B. Garey. An elementary text-book for the military beginner or those who wish to become Reserve Officers. Recommended by Major-General Leonard Wood for training camps and schools and colleges. 1917—The Century Co. New York City. $2.00 net. 340 pages. 165 illustrations.

Field Service, by Captain James A. Moss. Equipment of a company taking the field. Camp problems, cooking, first aid, etc. 1912—George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wis. $1.25 postpaid.

Privates' Manual, by Captain James A. Moss. Invaluable instruction boo'; for the private. Based on army regulations. Duties of enlisted man in detail. Suggestions for care of health, cooking, first aid, etc. 1916—George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wis. $1.00 postpaid.

Manual of Military Training, by Captain James A. Moss. A comprehensive manual on the training and instruction of a military company. Valuable guide to privates, non-commissioned officers and company officers. This one volume contains all essential material in Infantry Drill Regulations, Manual of the Bayonet, Manual of Interior Guard Duty, Manual of Physical Training, Small-Arms Firing Manual, Field Service Regulations, Minor Tactics. 1914—George Banta Publishing Co., Menasha, Wis. 699 pages. $2.25 postpaid.

Non-Commissioned Officers' Manual, by Captain James A. Moss. A comprehensive manual of the duties of non-commissioned army officers. Indispensable to non-commissioned officers and privates ambitious for promotion. 1913—George Banta Publishing Co. Revised Edition. Menasha, Wis. $1.50 postpaid. 417 pages.

Officers' Manual, by Captain James A. Moss. For the newly appointed army officer. Much about army organization he already knows but hundreds of helpful details about customs, commissary, printing forms, etc. 1914—George Banta Publishing Co. Revised Edition. Menasha, Wis. $2.50 postpaid.

Applied Minor Tactics, by Captain James A. Moss. For non-commissioned officers, privates and laymen. Problems of military map reading and map sketching. Also patrol duties, reconnoitering, signaling, etc. Several chapters reprinted from non-commissioned officers' manual. 1912—National Capital Press, Washington, D. C. $1.00.

What a Soldier Should Know, compiled by Major F. C. Bolles and Captains E. C. Jones and J. S. Upham. "The soldier's catechism." A book of questions and answers covering every detail of a soldier's duties. Valuable to the citizen and a constant aid to the enlisted man. 1917—Doubleday, Page & Co., Garden City, New York. $1.00.

Special Edition Infantry Drill Regulations. With War Department changes to Feb., 1917. Gives interpretations of the Drill Regulations, Illustrations of Manual of Arms and Manual of Saber and complete index of the Drill Regulations. Of great value in teaching recruits.—Army and Navy Journal, 20 Vesey St., New York City. 75 cents, postpaid.

Infantry Drill Regulations. Approved and published by authority of Secretary of War for the U. S. Army and Organized Militia, 1911. With War Department changes to date.—Army and Navy Journal, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Bristol board, 30 cents; cloth, 50 cents. Postpaid.

Field Service Regulations. (1914.) Latest revised edition.—Army and Navy Journal, 20 Vesey St., New York City. 75 cents, postpaid.

Manual of Interior Guard Duty. With War Department changes to Feb. 1915. This new edition supersedes the old Manual of Guard Duty and is so radical a departure therefrom as to be an entirely new work.—Army and Navy Journal, 20 Vesey St., New York City. 25 cents. Bound in fabrikoid, 50 cents, both postpaid.

Artillery

Elements of Modern Field Artillery, U. S. Service, by Major Harry G. Bishop. Reference notes for layman and Infantry and Cavalry officers, wishing general knowledge of artillery tactics. 1914—George Banta Publishing Co. Menasha, Wis. $1.50.

Coast Artillery Material, by Captain W. P. Platt, Coast Artillery Corps, U. S. A. Inspector-Instructor, California Coast Artillery. Description, adjustment and operation of Coast Artillery in drill and target practise. Prepared especially for officers and enlisted men of the National Guard. 1916—For sale Brentano's, Fifth Ave. and Twenty-seventh St., New York City. 60 cents.

Operation and Tactical Use of the Lewis Machine Gun. Based on experience of European War. Illustrated.—D. Van Nostrand Co., 25 Park Place, New York City. 75 cents, postpaid.

Signal, Aero and Sanitary Corps

The Mechanics of the Aeroplane, by Captain Duchene. An elementary study of the principles of flight. Will appeal to both amateurs and professionals.—Longmans, Green & Co., Fourth Ave. and Thirtieth St., New York City. $2.50.

Zeppelins and Super-Zeppelins, by R. P. Hearne. Construction of Zeppelins. Lessons learned from various raids in present war about protection from these craft. Weather conditions, how to fight Zeppelins, etc.—John Lane Co., New York City. $1.00 net. 158 pages, 25 illustrations.

The Airman, by Captain C. Mellor. Describes schools, expenses, sensations, etc. Book particularly for those planning to undertake first air training in France—John Lane Co., New York City. $1.00 net, postage 8 cents.

Field Sanitation, by Major James Sprigg Wilson. A handy field manual, particularly for non-commissioned officers. Camp diseases, personal hygiene, water purification, first aid, etc. 1914—George Banta Publishing Co. Menasha, Wis. 123 pages. Pocket edition. $1.00.

Manual of Military Hygiene—Red Cross Work, by Col. Valery Howard, Medical Corps, U.S.A. This book covers the subject in a thorough way. A copious index makes the book handy for reference. 1914—For sale Brentano's, Fifth Ave. and Twenty-seventh St., New York City. $5.00.

First Aid to the Injured and Ambulance Drill, by H. Drinkwater. A practical book, omitting all details not bearing on actual work. Takes up skeleton, respiration, bleeding, position of arteries, wounds, fractures, poisons, drowning, the preparing of all kinds of bandages, and the ambulance drill.—E. P. Dutton & Co., New York City. 35 cents.

First Aid Dentistry, by Lieut. E. P. R. Ryan, Dental Corps, U.S.A. For medical and dental practitioners and students or nurses. The methods included, which are limited to first aid that will relieve suffering, are described in simple, non-technical language. 1914—For sale Brentano's, Fifth Ave. and Twenty-seventh St., New York City. $1.25.

Searchlights: Their Theory, Construction and Application, by F. Merz. Trans. by C. Rodgers. Illustrated.—D. Van Nostrand Co., 25 Park Place, New York City. $3.00.

How to Pass U. S. Government Wireless License Examinations, by E. E. Bucher. One hundred and eighteen Government examination questions answered for elementary students of radio communication. 1916—For sale Brentano's, Fifth Ave. and Twenty-seventh St., New York City. 50 cents.

The Navy

Modern Seamanship, by Rear-Admiral Austin M. Knight, U.S.N. This standard text-book, officially adopted by the U. S. Naval Academy and throughout the service, is brought up to date in this seventh edition.—D. Van Nostrand Co., 25 Park Place, New York City. $6.50 postpaid.

Fundamentals of Naval Service, by Commander Yates Sterling, U. S. N. A manual for citizens who serve their country on the water. Valuable for newly enlisted men. 1917—J. B. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia, Pa. $1.50.

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On Navigation Simplified, by C. E. MacArthur. A handbook containing the problems required for U. S. Local Inspector's examination of masters and mates. Deals solely with principles of navigation on high seas. Valuable to amateur sailors doing patrol duty. 1916—Rudder Publishing Co., New York City. $1.00. Pocket edition.

Military and Naval America, by Captain Harrison S. Kerrick. A comprehensive summary of the organization and activities of the various army and navy bureaus. Of value to students, teachers and the general public. 1916—Doubleday, Page & Co., Garden City, New York. $2.00.

Oxford Bibles for Soldiers and Sailors. Printed on Oxford India paper, convenient for the knapsack. Bound in khaki.—For sale Brentano's, Fifth Ave. and Twenty-seventh St., New York City. $1.60.

Sea, Land and Air Strategy, by Col. Sir G. Aston. A comparison between the principles of the conduct of warfare at sea, on land and in the air.—Little, Brown & Co., Boston, Mass. $3.50.

THE above list has been selected from many books and represents what seems the best information available. In the next issue, out August 18th, others will be added, following the examination of other books. ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure's* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

A free department for the benefit of those readers who wish to buy or sell back copies of this magazine.

Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

Will sell: 1914 except Jan., Feb.; 1915 all; 1916 except Aug.; 1917 to June inclusive; 37 issues, $3.—J. M. Backer, 3312 Beach Ave., Chicago.

Will sell: 1910 Dec.; 1911 all except Feb., March, Oct.; 1912 all; 1913 all; 1914 all; 1915 all; 1916 all.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use only a very few fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of every six or seven inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Adventurers' Club—No connection with this magazine, but data will be furnished by us. Can join only by attending a meeting of an existing chapter or starting a new chapter as provided in the Club's rules.

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. Entirely separate from Adventurers' Club, but, like it, first suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

National School Camp Ass'n—Military and industrial training and camps for boys 12 or over. Address 1 Broadway, New York City.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—A similar organization coöperating with the N. S. C. A. (above). Address EVERYBODY'S, Spring and Macdougal, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue or the one—or possibly two—following it.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, but no question answered unless stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE, *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal, Can. ★ Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; *especially*, seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to laws, customs and conditions local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Wallace.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N.Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson-City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. North American Snow Countries Part 1
C. L. GILMAN, 708 Oneida Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. ★ Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. ★ Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

13. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 805 Jackson St., Santa Clara, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel: boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

15. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

16. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached.*)

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Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

17. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

18. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

19. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

20. Russia and Eastern Siberia
A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Adventurers' Club, 26 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

21. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

22. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

23. ★ The South Seas Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

24. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, care of H. E. ROBERTS, 55 John Street, New York, N. Y. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

Lower California

Question:—"I will appreciate your answers to the following questions, and any other information you can give me on the islands, waters and coasts of the Gulf of California, also about the mainland of Lower California. Would like to know if country is gold-bearing; oils; other minerals. How about streams, springs and water of coast and back country, natives, geography, vegetation? Is it a good cattle or sheep country? Could you give me any information on the pearl fisheries of the Gulf? Would appreciate especially all information you can give me on the Tiburon Islands."—ROY W. SHIPLEY, Orange, California.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—You have fallen into the same error that many inquirers do trip over. You have made your questions cover enough to keep me at this typewriter all day and far into the night. I can only sketch.

Lower California is very largely desert, especially in its southern half. It is rich in mineral deposits, coal and oil not discovered, iron in northern part. I know one group of mining claims where iron ore stands up in great dykes and pinnacles. South end full of gold, a good bit of silver farther north. Water scarce, natives hellish, vegetation largely greasewood, mesquite, sage.

As to geography—study maps. Lower California where it joins Imperial is good ranch land. Haven't you read of the great ranches owned by Americans in that section? Maier, Otis, Hearst, Cudahy?

Most of the islands in the Gulf are of little importance, rocky, sandy and bare. Tiburon was home of Seri tribe, falsely called cannibal, now said to have been carried off and sold into slavery on mainland. Only life on island now is flies, lizards and turtles. If this island were as rich in minerals as fabled, men who knew would be swarming on it now. Mexican side of gulf is rich land, plenty of water, lots of mineral; as you go inland there is splendid cattle land, with grass waist-high on the mesas. I have friends who know every foot of the first fifty miles back of tidewater clear to Tepic, so I can speak understandingly. But it is impracticable to think of going there now.

Homesteading in Canada

Question:—"What can you tell me of the Canada homestead land in the Peace River valley? Is it timber land or prairie and is it suitable for grain?"—E. J. GATTON, Davenport, Iowa.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—There is an immense amount of good farming land in the Peace River country, both timber and prairie. It is also comparatively easy to pick up a "quarter," or 160 acres, in a creek-bottom where there is a fair share of both, the flat being prairie and the raise on the hills being timbered. This is the right location to get, care being taken not to have the valley too narrow so that the snow will drift in too heavily and thus offset the advantage of shelter during the blizzards.

To reach it I would suggest that you go to Edmonton and from there to either Dunvegan or Peace River Landing and look the country over.

Don't go in alone. Take the most congenial partner with you that you can find. You can stake your claims side by side and have your houses a few feet apart, if you so desire.

The Summers are short but the days are long, that is, there is a wonderful amount of sunshine and the growth is remarkably rapid. Grain is being raised very successfully in this region and it is only a question of a short time till the transportation problem will be solved.

Bear, deer, caribou and plenty of smaller game

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are abundant, while the fishing in nearly every creek and river is extremely good.

The Winters are rather severe, but a healthy man can stand it till he gets to the time when he can spend his Winters "outside." It is no place for a woman, but a *skookum* man can find plenty to interest him, while a certain amount of profit is bound to come to the intelligently industrious.

United States Forest Rangers

Question:—"I would like information regarding the United States Forest Rangers and what course of study is necessary to prepare for this branch of service. Am a lumberman, twenty years old, and I believe I know hardwood timber as well as any one my age. Have also spent one year in Northern Alberta, Canada."—WALDO DRAKE, Osborn, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—As to the course of study necessary to prepare yourself for a Forest Ranger's place, write the Chief of the Forestry Department, Washington, D. C., asking for information along this line.

Forest Rangers are chosen through competitive examinations held every so often by the U. S. Civil Service Commission. The entrance salary is $900 to $1,100 per year, and runs on upward, I understand, to about $1,800 per year for the very able man. I am told by reliable parties that no examinations will be held for the Appalachian Division for several years. However, I gather that there will be openings in other Reservations, notably Western Reservations.

Employment in South America

Question:—"I have followed the sea for five years. Would like to work my way to South America and settle there. How can I do this? What would it be best to look for there?"—HARRY WHITE, Boston, Mass.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—One of the first requisites for a career in South America is a knowledge of Spanish; Portuguese also is an asset; but Spanish is absolutely necessary if a fellow expects to ever get more than a poor job and a poor living.

There is no great difficulty about getting there. The Lamport & Holt Steamship Company, of New York, runs steamers to Brazil and other southern countries, and in common with all other lines at present always needs men with your experience. They will not ship a man for the single passage; but I know if a man arrives at a port and wishes to stay there, he can always find means of staying.

The best prospects I know of are in either Brazil, Argentina, or Uruguay, back of the coast, in the cattle and agriculture industries, which are rapidly growing. In the absence of any knowledge of what you can do besides sailor's or fireman's work, those are the only lines I can recommend. In the cities, an American or European can hardly compete with native whites or thoroughly prepared aliens who have studied language and customs before going there. With a knowledge of Spanish, however slight, a man will find plenty of work and congenial people; while as for conditions of life, no finer cities exist anywhere than the larger towns of the three republics named above.

There are plenty of shipping concerns down on those coasts, where you might easily spend a few months running between ports, and thus acquiring a knowledge of Spanish. That might prove your best plan, I think. Besides the Lamport & Holt Line, there are several lesser groups of steamers plying from Eastern ports; these you can easily learn by enquiring at the Seaman's Institute, South Street, New York; or any similar institute in Boston. At these places, too, you may ship without trouble or fee.

Information on South America ought to be accessible in your own public library. Go there and tell the librarian exactly what you want. He will advise the books. For fuller and newer data, write Mr. John Barrett, Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C. Or write me again if you have any difficulty.

Hunting in Alaska

Question:—Your name is given in *Adventure Magazine* as willing to supply information on Alaska. I am anticipating a hunting-trip there in the near future. Any information which you can give me relative to a successful bear and moose hunting trip together with the necessary expense and proper season for the same will be greatly appreciated.

I shall also appreciate information on clothing, food, and equipment. I am using the Ross .280 rifle. Do you consider it entirely satisfactory for the big Alaska bears?"—C. D. PIERCE, Craftsbury, Vt.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—I have seen more moose and bear, especially the large and formidable Alaskan grizzly in the Yukon basin than elsewhere in Alaska. The Yukon is the most convenient place to hunt them, also, because its large tributaries enable the hunter to get over the country, which is everywhere in the north the main problem, due to the soft underfoot, wearing alike to pack-animal and man. With a poling-boat of light draft, procurable at any of the settlements, you have a wide range of territory accessible; and moose and small bear are fairly plentiful anywhere beyond the few mining centers.

It costs about $100 to get into the country from Seattle, and the same to return, unless you can arrange for a long-term round-trip ticket; the White Pass and Yukon route is the shortest and best, and Dawson or White Horse or farther down river would be good starting-points. Take nothing but ordinary hunting impedimenta and clothing. Alaska in the Summer is like anywhere else in all respects, except that you ought to have water-proof footwear or else a change or two, since many (including myself) prefer ordinary high shoes, even though these get wet, to rubber. Then we change to dry at camping-time. Mosquito frames over head and shoulders are a vital necessity, and buckskin gloves. A light tent is desirable because of mosquitoes. Light canvas to protect outfit in boat or on pack is, of course, procurable from the stores, and all other provisions. The boat is much to be preferred to a pack-animal.

I am not familiar enough with the rifle you mention to answer your question, but from experience I would council you to take a weapon that tears as well as bores, as the big bear is a particularly formidable animal with remarkable tenacity of life. They are not plentiful, but you have no trouble in finding one or two in a month's hunt. June 15 is a good time to start from Seattle.

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Question:—What Government owns the Isle of Pines which lies just south of Cuba? Can you refer to me any books which would give me any definite knowledge of this island such as climatic conditions, size and population?—WALLACE E. KINNEY, Lincoln, Neb.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—Replying to your query regarding Isle of Pines:

This island belongs to Cuba, to which Government it is of course subject. Thirty-five miles southwest of Cuba, its area is roughly 1,000 miles—population about 3,000 to 4,000.

American colonists have at times agitated for annexation to the U. S. A., but the Government has always decided against this measure.

The southern portion much resembles the Everglades of Florida, but developments are in active progress. Climate is variable, but on the whole not bad. Pineapples, tobacco and potatoes are largely grown, and much valuable timber—mahogany, etc. —covers the hill section to the north. Cattle are raised, too, and there are deposits of a beautiful grade of colored marble.

Most of the population resides in the capital, Nueva Gerona and Santa Fé.

Up to quite recently, the chief drawback to land development has been the swarming ants; but these have been checked largely by dynamite blasting.

You will obtain full information regarding this territory by applying to the Department of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada,

***Adventure* has found one man out of five asked for during the past two years.**

GARRISON, CHAS.; last heard of Grand Rapids, Mich. Summer of 1911 with Sanger's Combined Shows. Left Reed City, Mich. Last seen in Grand Rapids, Mich. Home in Bloomington, Ind. Mother dead. Lived with stepfather. Was member of State Militia. Write your old pal.—Address FRANK BATCHELOR, Box 354, Grayling, Mich.

MOREY, SYLVESTER, formerly of Greenwich, N. Y. Last seen June, 1914, Adams House, Boston, on way to join Navy. Attended Craven Laycock's School for Boys in N. H. 5 ft. 7 in., blond, blue eyes, large Adam's apple. Known as "Fruit" or "Tweet." Important papers here for you. Let your old bunkmates hear from you. We have struck it rich.—Address "SHRIMP" BRICKFORD, "PAPA" POOLE, FONTAN STODDARD, 24 third Street, Newport, R. I.

BARBER, ROBERT WILLIS; born in Clifton, Colchester Co., Nova Scotia, August, 1863. Left house for Calif. in 1883 or 1884. 5 ft. 11 in., light complexion, blue eyes. Last heard from was going to Nome, Alaska, about 9 yrs. ago. Brother Stuart now dead, sisters Katharine and Elizabeth in San Francisco, Calif. Please write.—Address MRS. MINERVA (BARBER) TARBOX, Chatham St., East Lynn, Mass.

GORMLEY, HARRY J.; formerly non-com., Coast Artillery, Fort Wadsworth, N. Y. In Yonkers, N. Y., during 1905-06. Do you remember a night visit to Fort Slocum, N. Y., November, 1906, to say *adios* to a rooky ordered to Fort Clarke, Texas? If so, please write.—Address F. D. Y., care *Adventure*.

WALKER, HUGH VICTOR; my son, left Seattle, Wash., Sept., 1914, on British freighter *Hyndford* under charter to Hind, Rolph & Co. with lumber for Calcutta, British India. Letters sent were returned. Dark hair, light blue eyes; 5 ft. 7 in.; 160 lbs.; scar on forehead. —Address MRS. JESSIE M. HUSSEY, Route 1, Box 42, Okanogan, Wash.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

MONTGOMERY, SAMUEL B.; my brother, born in Belfast, Ireland. Was last heard of in Cleveland, O. 5 ft. 7 in., fair complexion, gray eyes.—Address JAMES MONTGOMERY, Co. A, 34th Inf., Marathon, Texas.

SMITH, RUTH B.; my niece. Last heard of in Wichita, Kansas. Would like to hear from her.—Address KATIE BRACKETT, Box 58, Jennings Lodge, Ore.

BOYS that were to sail with the Adventure Expedition, from New York on the last of September or the first of October. Please write—Address JOHN S. SMITH, R. F. D. 2, Box 18, Decatur, Texas.

HOWARD, WILL or JACK; with me in Sinaloa, Mex. Write Dick at once.—Address R. S., care *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SMITH, JOHN; uncle; blacksmith. Last heard of in Minneapolis. About 54 years, light complected, blue eyes, slender. His daughter Teresa is here and wants to hear from him. Left Cardigan, P. E. I., some 26 years ago. His niece would like to hear from any one having any information regarding him.—Address MRS. MARY A. POWERS, 465 Essex St., Lawrence, Mass.

WRIGHT, GRANVILLE; sometimes known as C. G. Wright. Dental College student, last heard of Atlanta, 3 yrs. ago where he was attending school. Disappeared suddenly. 22 yrs.; black hair; brown eyes; 5 ft. 8 in.; 140 lbs.; wears glasses. Brother inquires.—Address FREEMAN E. WRIGHT, Box 836, Charleston, S. C.

SCHOENFELD, ED. O.; last seen about 7 yrs. ago. Was down to Fla. to see him but he left for Texas about 9 months ago. 5 ft. 11 in.; had only one eye.; age 25. Communicate with me—address JOE A. VINCENT, 1361½ Brown St., Phila., Pa.

PFEIFFER, BILL, (Red) Ussery, Tommy Kirtz and any of the bunch on the U. S. S. *St. Louis* from Oct., 1914, to July, 1915. Please write.—Address R. L. GOSSETT, Hughes Springs, Texas.

ACKLEY, JOHN A.; enlisted in the Artillery, U. S. Army, January, 1915, and was sent to the border. Please write to me.—Address SAM REVETT, Co. "D" 1st U. S. Inf., Schofield B'k's, H. T.

HICKMAN, GEORGE D.; last seen in Detroit, Mich., Labor Day, 1915. Please write to your old pal.—Address LEWIS P. GRAHAM, 88 Beverley St., Toronto, Ont., Can.

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THURSTON, FRANK A.; or any of his friends. Formerly of Sauk Co., Wis. Communicate with me and learn whereabouts of his son "Cecil."—Address FRANK BOOTHLY, Clayburn, B. C., Can.

DOUGLAS, L. D.; (Spig). Last heard of on U. S. S. *Milwaukee*. Please write your old pal.—Address R. L. GOSSET, Hughes Springs, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JACKSON, CLAUDE (commonly called Jack). Last heard from Mar. 29, 1913. Delphi, Wash. Was working for Littlejohn Bros. Logging Camp. Write to your old pal.—Address EARL RIX, Hemlock, N. Y.

CROFFT, MARIE GONZALEZ. My wife. Anxious to hear from her—Address LORENZO GONZALEZ, care *Adventure*.

H. E. F.; please write to your Mother at once.—Address A. I. O., care *Adventure*.

JULLIFFE, ARTHUR; write your old pal "Peck." Can place you something good.—Address L. T. 351.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

THE FOLLOWING have been inquired for in full in either the July or August issues of *Adventure*. You can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ALDRICK, R. S.; Allen, William C.; Bechtel, George (Longshoreman); Bengthsson, Alfred, generally known as Fred or Al. Benson; Bloom, Paul or "The White Dutchman;" Botts, Mrs.; Bromley, Arthur; Chaplin, Frederick L.; Connolly, Charles; Crisp, Edward; Durst, Lloyd; Egan, Edward; Foote, Alden Willert and Arthur Longworth; Frankie, "Bottles;" Glover, Martin; Green, Glenn S.; Hill, R. E.; Hunt, Arthur; Jones, Charles Augustus; Kavanagh, Edward; Lynch, P. J. A.; Mackie, Jacob O.; Martin, Florence; Maxiam, Marcotte; Miller, Thomas Lion; Neuton, Jesse O.; Parker, first name unknown; Preston, Bud; Riley, A. P.; Saaranen, Julius; Sammons, Wm. H.; Smith, Geo. L.; Solar, William T. (Dutch); Van Horne, Walter W.; Wallace, Oliver R.; Walling, Lew; West, Rolla; Westcott, George; Wilbur, Walter.

MISCELLANEOUS: Fred; Member of Co. "G" 13th U. S. Inf., Ft. Wingate, N. M., from 1880 to 1884 Boys of Co. T., P. S. of T.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, W. E. Felts, Jan Spaander, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Twice-a-month ADVENTURE is now a fact. The first mid-month number will be in your hands on August 18th. Beside those strong stories mentioned in the ad. on page 2, are the following:

The Ninth Man *By Edgar Young*
Nine Americans traverse unknown jungles back of the Northern Andes hunting the source of Inca gold.

Appreciating Peter *By Harold Titus*
One of the thousands of little incidents of big New York, but one which will grip you.

Salt Water and Gasoline *By Roy P. Churchill*
A sailor in the U. S. Navy with a hobby for racing motor-cars, and shore leave which gives him his chance.

The Hurricane *By Charles Brown, Jr.*
A strong story of native life on a South Sea Island.

The Vanished Plans *By W. S. Wightman*
How an American Army officer in the Philippines sought them.

Gaston Olaf and Big Business *By Henry Oyen*
The second part of this thrilling tale of the Snow Country. A strong man's fight against an unscrupulous corporation.

The Tent in the Mallee *By Hugh S. Miller*
A man-hunt in the wilds of Central Australia.

Deferred *By Captain A. E. Dingle*
A sea-voyage and a fight which lasts almost all the way.

Wild and Woolly *By Clarence Phillips*
Baseball is catching, and Jonesy caught it bad. Even an auto accident and a hospital cot could not keep him from the game.

A Case At Law *By William Dudley Pelley*
The latest drink cure—and how a Montana lawyer practised it.

MID-SEPTEMBER ADVENTURE

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Quartermaster Sergeant A. W. Jahn and privates W. H. McKnight, R. W. Judge, H. Dunn and W. Emerson, of Second Pennsylvania Brigade Headquarters, photographed en route to Fort Bliss, Texas, with auto supply truck. Look for the famous muslin sack.

U. S. Soldiers "Rolling" Along The Trail

Take a smoke-tip from Uncle Sam's soldier boys—try "Bull" Durham on *your* job and note how smoothly your day's work rolls along.

You can make for yourself, with your own hands, the mildest, most fragrant, most enjoyable cigarette in the world—and the most economical. Machines can't imitate it. The only way to get that freshness, that flavor, that lasting satisfaction—is to "roll your own" with

GENUINE

"BULL" DURHAM

TOBACCO

The "Makings" of a Nation

A Suggestion to Pipe Smokers

Just try mixing a little genuine "Bull" Durham tobacco with your favorite pipe tobacco—It's like sugar in your coffee

The American Tobacco Co.

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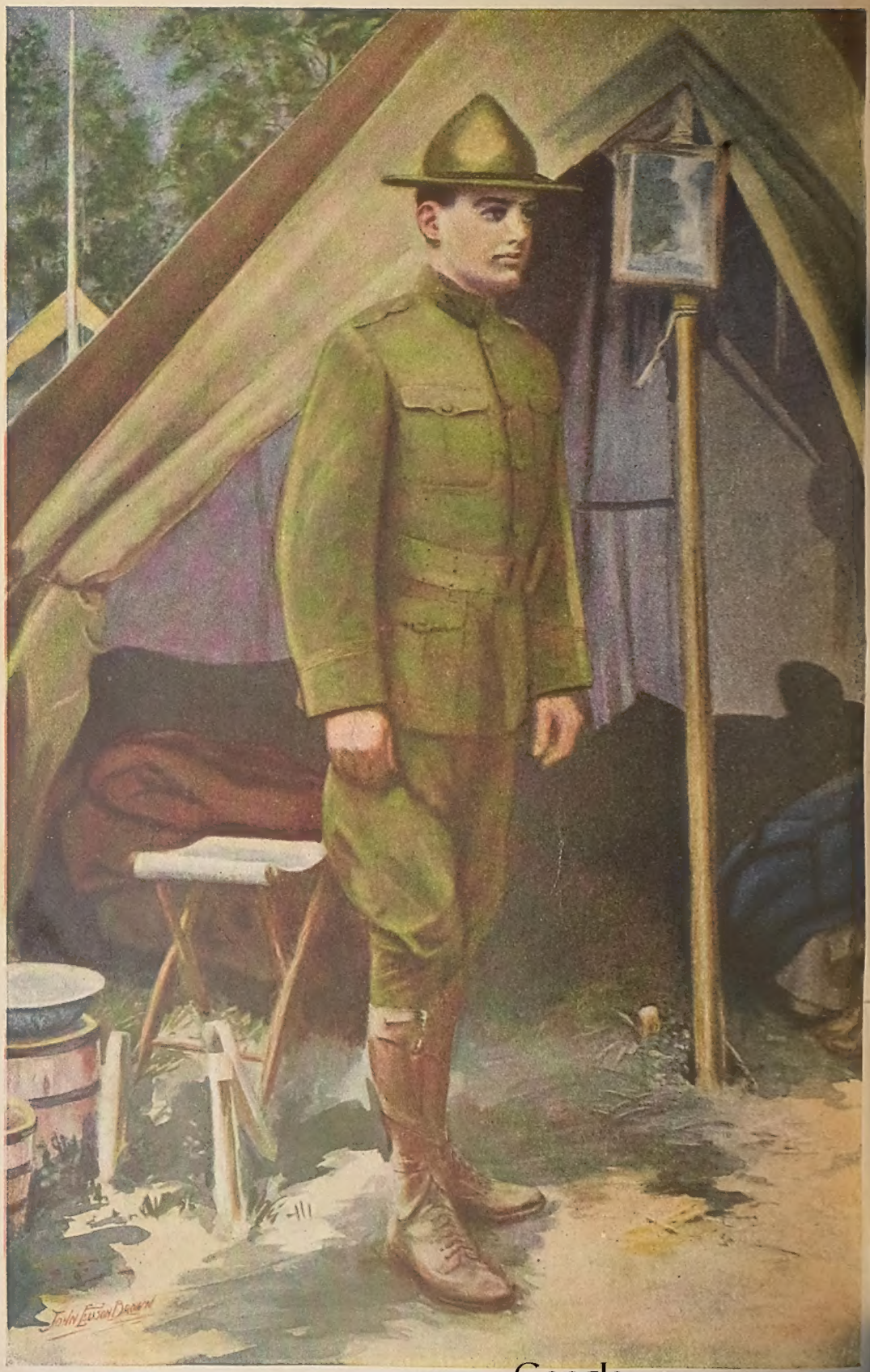

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Like a good soldier Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen is always ready